



Class 231 Q

Book 5158

General Theological Seminary Library

Chelsea Square, New York

PRESENTED BY

Soc'y for Promoting Religion and Learning

Handwritten notes in the top left corner, including a signature and the date 1/1/12.

THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE
OF GOD.



The Christian Doctrine of God.

Lectures

DELIVERED TO THE MEMBERS
OF THE

S. PAUL'S LECTURE SOCIETY.

BY THE

REV. W. J. SPARROW-SIMPSON, M.A.,

CHAPLAIN OF S. MARY'S HOSPITAL, ILFORD.

London :

PUBLISHED FOR THE

S. PAUL'S LECTURE SOCIETY

BY

RICHARD FLINT & CO.,

49, FLEET STREET.

1906.

IMPORTED BY
THOMAS WHITTAKER,
2 & 3 BIBLE HOUSE,
NEW YORK.

231Q

5158

42178

YHABED GHT XBO

YHABE

XBOY WBN

PREFACE

THE following Lectures were given in the Crypt Chapel of S. Paul's Cathedral at the invitation of the S. Paul's Lecture Society. Such an assembly of men as gathers habitually at the meetings of this Society, intent, at the close of a busy day in the City, not without some self-sacrifice, to hear an exposition of some great Christian truth, is a sight calculated to make one yearn for power to speak less inadequately on so great a theme. The writer hoped, at least, that these lectures might serve as an introduction to further study. The course was repeated before the Church

Lecture Society at Ilford, and also during Lent of the present year in the Church of S. Michael, Brighton. They are now published by the S. Paul's Lecture Society, for whom they were originally written.

CONTENTS.

LECTURE I.

	PAGE
THE SCRIPTURE TEACHING	3

LECTURE II.

THE FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH IN FORMU- LATING THE DOCTRINE OF GOD . . .	41
--	----

LECTURE III.

THE PERSONALITY OF GOD	95
--------------------------------	----

LECTURE IV.

THE VALUE OF THE TRINITARIAN CONCEPTION TO MODERN THOUGHT	123
--	-----

I

THE SCRIPTURE TEACHING.

I.

THE SCRIPTURE TEACHING.

THE Christian doctrine of God is distinguished from that of other religions by the fact that it is Trinitarian. The doctrine of the Trinity is not a scaffolding erected to promote the building of a doctrine about God, removable after having served a temporary use ; nor is it an appendix to a doctrine otherwise complete in itself : on the contrary it is the very essence of the Christian conception. It is this doctrine which differentiates Christianity from all other religions. Whereas other religions are founded either on belief in one solitary divine Person, or on belief in many separate divinities, the Catholic Faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity. That is the peculiar distinction of our religion.

Christianity is indeed strictly Monotheistic, as true religion assuredly must be ; but it is a Monotheism compatible with inner relationship.¹ God is One, yet He subsists in Three Persons, whose relationships are really distinct while their essence and absolute existence are identical. The nature of God is indivisible, yet, according to Christianity, within that nature co-exist three distinctions of persons, and these distinctions are neither arbitrary, nor variable, nor capable in any manner of increase or diminution. They are not various earthward manifestations in successive periods of one divine Person. They are not distinctions which merely exist *for us*. There are inner distinctions in the very selfhood of God. They are eternal. There are, always have been, and must ever continue, neither more nor less than Three Persons in a nature eternally One. Such is the Trinitarian Faith, the Christian conception of God.

¹ Heinrich, 'Dogm. Theol.,' vii. 27.

I.

Our first endeavour must be to study the historic circumstances in which this doctrine appeared. And here we have to note two things: the place where it originated, the Person who proclaimed it.

1. As to the place. It arose, as every one is aware, something less than 2,000 years ago in Israel.

The religion of Israel at the beginning of the Christian Era was distinguished by uncompromising affirmation of the unity of God. This was Israel's fundamental faith. But the doctrine of divine Unity was by no means the conviction of the surrounding peoples. All round the chosen race flourished belief in numerous divinities. Polytheism was a widely prevalent and vigorous growth. Whatever its origin, there is no dispute as to its extent or its popularity. It exerted over the ancient world an attractiveness almost unintelligible to modern thought. Even Israel itself was

unable to resist the fascination, and yielded again and again. Indeed the doctrine of God's Unity seems rather pressed upon them from without than peacefully evolved from within. They would, if left to themselves, prefer to be polytheists like the rest. They were the reluctant recipients of an uncongenial mission. It was long before they willingly accepted and wholly identified themselves with a duty from which they could not escape. Successive generations repeated this dislike. They fell away like their forefathers, starting aside like a broken bow. Their apostasy from the mission imposed was sternly rebuked and severely visited. But it required some centuries of sobering experience before the nation was disciplined into full and undivided loyalty to the splendid truth entrusted to their keeping. Not until reiterated prophetic instructions and the bitter sufferings of the Exile had done their work did the people really arise to a full acceptance of their mission, cured for ever from those polytheistic proclivities whose

disastrous influence hung for centuries like a shadow and a blight across the pathway of their duty. Henceforward Israel was inseparably identified with the conviction of the Unity of God, and prepared for the most uncompromising assertion of a truth now ingrained into the very fibres of its constitution.

These difficulties which even Israel experienced in resisting multitudinous divinities, and in concentrating its devotion and its faith on the Unity of God, may enable us to understand why the Revelation of the Trinity was long delayed. It seems that uncompromising insistence on God's Unity was an essential preliminary in the education of the human race to greater truths. Polytheism had to be uprooted before the Trinitarian doctrine could be advantageously revealed. Monotheism is, after all, essential to the Trinitarian truth. And unless the former is firmly held the latter cannot be safely proclaimed. This fact may partly explain why it was that the religious training

of the human race had to be progressive, why it was that the doctrine of the Trinity was not delivered long before.

We can also understand that nothing is more natural than that the proclamation of this larger truth should synchronise with the coming of the Son of God in human form. It may very well be that nothing but actual experience of the Incarnation could have enabled us to understand, or could have introduced it as a living reality into human life.

The mission of Israel, then, was to proclaim the unity of God. And this mission could scarcely allow more than imperfect indications of the Trinity in the Old Testament.¹ It is true that the Old Testament language has proved capable of admitting and expressing Trinitarian conceptions. To those who believe in Inspiration this will not seem strange. But it will not necessarily follow that psalmist or prophet comprehended all that his language admitted or implied.

¹ Grébillat, *Dogmatique*, iii. 172.

If the Hebrew religion was a providential preparation for the perfect Creed, we shall readily understand that its language was prepared to be used in fuller senses when that higher revelation came. Thus it may be perfectly true that the plural in Genesis, 'Let Us make man,' or 'the man is become as one of Us,' may, in the writer's intention, denote a plural of dignity, or at any rate fall far short of suggesting to contemporary thought plurality of Persons; and yet the providential overruling of the phrase may be significantly intended for Christian uses. Some indeed can see no more in the triple reiteration of 'Holy, Holy, Holy' than an emphatic insistence, parallel to the phrase, 'O earth, earth, earth, hear the Word of the Lord,' but the naturalness of the transference of these words of adoration to the highest act of Christian worship is, to soberer insight, surely more than a misuse, or an accident, or a coincidence. And, passing by all other hints and possibilities, who can fail to notice that the Aaronic blessing was cast in a

triple form? Surely it is very wonderful that Christendom can formulate its full Trinitarian faith in the very terms of the ancient Hebrew benediction. We can hardly think it other than intended and overruled that our full Christian adoration and our benediction can be breathed in phrases which the Old Testament has provided. At the same time it can scarcely be surprising if recipients of the Christian Revelation can fill the words with deeper contents than was possible in the days of the Hebrew legislator.

But hints and suggestions of a Trinity are said to be found in many religions, and intimations of a Trinity widely spread; so much so that the Christian doctrine is sometimes supposed to have been derived from them.¹

That there are such intimations is perfectly natural if the doctrine is true. They would show that the human mind was moving in that direction. They would pave the way for its acceptance. But it would by no

¹ Cf. A. Moore in 'Lux Mundi.'

means follow that these anticipations created the doctrine or that it was derived from them. The whole character of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is so independent and unique that it is impossible that it could have been created out of non-Christian materials. It arose inevitably, as we shall see, out of the data of the Christian Religion.

But the fact that the doctrine of the Trinity arose in Israel, is one whose significance ought never to be overlooked. This doctrine was proclaimed in Israel—that is to say, in the heart of the sternest Monotheism ever known, in the one region where belief in many divine persons was viewed as the worst apostasy and punished in the severest ways ; in Israel—that is to say, in the religion out of which Mohammedanism came ! This surely is a fact of great significance. Trinitarianism would seem foreign to the genius of that faith, a plant that could not grow from such a soil. For it is just there that it would inevitably meet with the fiercest opposition. Just

there its bare existence would seem most precarious. Men would instinctively resent it and resist it there, as they would not resent it in a religion of many divinities. Men who believed in innumerable divine persons would not be much disturbed when informed that there were three. But men to whom God's personal oneness was a truth to die for, could not tolerate the daring exaltation of three names into the precincts of Deity. The origin of Trinitarian conceptions in such an atmosphere as that of Israel can only be accounted for by the fact of its logical necessity, as involved in the Incarnation. It was forced upon the unitarian mind of the Jew by the pressure of the contents of the new Revelation.

2. So far then as to the place where the doctrine originated. The next point in the historic circumstances is its Proclaimer.

The ultimate authority for the doctrine is Jesus Christ. And here of course the question confronts us, What are the grounds upon which that authority is accepted?

Can a doctrine so tremendous rest on the affirmation of a solitary historic figure? This is a question which each thoughtful man has had to face. We have accepted the doctrine on Christ's assertion. But why? Is this rational? I am deeply persuaded that it is not only rational but the only rational course. Let any believer in God, from whatever source that belief may be derived, face the historic facts of the Person of Christ. Professor Goldwin Smith, in his '*Guesses at the Riddle of Existence*,'¹ from a standpoint very far from Christian, nevertheless acknowledges, in a remarkable sentence, the suggestions of Deity in the work of Christ. 'The effect produced by the teaching of Jesus and His disciples is, beyond question, the most momentous fact in history.' 'Here, if at any point in history, we may believe that the Spirit of the World, if the world has a spirit, was at work.' According to this gifted writer, if God exists, He spoke through

¹ Page 137.

Christ. If ever God revealed Himself to humanity, He revealed Himself through Christ. Why? Because Christ is morally supreme. The Person of Jesus is the most unearthly, the most godlike, that ever trod this sinful earth. Here is not only the fact, as the same writer says, that 'the teaching of Jesus carried morality to the sublimest point attained or even attainable by humanity'; but, as the same writer adds, 'The influence of His spiritual religion has been rendered doubly great by the unparalleled purity and elevation of His own character.' Here moral ideals are not only taught but realised. Christ is what He taught, His teaching is a commentary on His actions, He reflects divine perfection. If the world has a spirit, that Spirit of the World was working here. That is to say, belief in God necessitates belief that Jesus is His Messenger. Does then the writer whom I quote believe that Jesus is God's Messenger? No. But why? Because he is not certain that God exists. He is

not persuaded that the world has a spirit. But his acute and penetrating mind cannot avoid the conclusion that no believer in God can consistently refuse to recognise in Jesus God's Messenger and God's reflection. The moral glory of Jesus certifies His authority as God's Messenger. And surely this line of thought commends itself to what is morally deepest within us. This is the divinest that the earth can show. If I cannot trust this Messenger as sent from God I can trust no other. That is the alternative for the modern world. Either Christ is our teacher or no one.

II.

We have considered hitherto the historic circumstances in which this doctrine appeared. We are to study next the actual revelation of that doctrine in Holy Scripture.

1. First comes the creative period, the period of the teaching of Jesus Christ on the doctrine of God.

He began with the conception of God's

Unity which Israel had been commissioned to proclaim. He reaffirmed the old truth in the old words. When challenged to indicate the supreme principle of the Law He repeated the central text of the Hebrew Scripture : 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.' Then, on the basis of the divine Unity, He began to teach enlarged conceptions.

(1) The first development made by Jesus Christ was in His doctrine of the Fatherhood of God. Nothing is more characteristic of His conception of God than this doctrine of Fatherhood. But the Fatherhood of God as taught by Jesus Christ meant something much more than relationship with the human race. Certainly He taught that men were or might become sons of God. But it is no less certain that He claimed a unique relationship between that Father and Himself. It must indeed be remembered, that the teaching of Jesus had to be progressive. He was restricted, as every

teacher must be, by the recipient's capacity. And it is clear that He employed the title Son of God in various senses. That title might convey to His hearers three distinct conceptions : first, adoptive,¹ which every Jew might share and therefore none dispute ; next, official,² as the Christ, the appointed Head of the Chosen Race ; and finally, personal,³ as asserting equality with the eternal God. The state of the hearer's mind might and did at times prevent our Lord rising above the second or official meaning. But there were also occasions when He assuredly employed the phrase in the sense of personal equality. Even Harnack¹ acknowledges that 'Jesus is convinced that He knows God in a way in which no one ever knew Him before,' and puts into the words *My God* and *My Father* something which belongs to no one but Himself. What that something is and how He came to think it Harnack calls 'His

¹ For further discussion cf. 'Our Lord's Resurrection,' p. 299.

secret,' and no psychology, he says, will ever fathom it. Now that claim of Jesus to something which belongs to no one but Himself is a claim to personal equality with God. This fact is forced upon us not only by the Gospel of S. John, although of course it is chiefly developed there, but also by such words as those recorded in S. Matthew xi. 27 : ' All things are delivered unto Me of My Father, and no man knoweth the Son but the Father, neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.' Here the relation of the Father to the Son, that is, of God to Jesus Christ, is asserted to be one of perfect mutual understanding. He and God completely understand one another. If any human being ever comes to understand the Father it can only be through the mediation of Jesus Christ. Such language not only isolates Jesus Christ from humanity and places Him midway between man and God. It does far more. It paves the way for a recognition of His equality with God. For

it implies that Jesus Christ, in His deepest self, has closer affinities with God than He has with man. This conception of His relation to the Heavenly Father is the same in principle as that which pervades the entire Gospel of S. John. To condense the summary given by a most distinguished German critic¹: In these discourses Jesus says of Himself that He did not originate from this world, nor from beneath, like His Jewish adversaries, but from above; that He had come down from heaven and would go up to heaven; that He had proceeded and was come from God. He speaks what He knows and testifies what He has seen. He alone has seen the Father. He stands continually in this fellowship with the Father, so that on the one side His Father knows Him and loves Him, never leaves Him alone, shows Him all things which Himself does; and on the other side the Son does nothing of Himself but only that which He sees the Father doing. Moreover

¹ Wendt, 'Teaching of Jesus,' ii. 155-6.

He and the Father are one, and it can be said that to have seen Him is to have seen the Father.

The impression created by this teaching upon the Jews was that the speaker isolated Himself from the common sonship with God which any member of the chosen race might claim, and said that God was His Father in such a sense as to make Himself equal with God.¹

Here, then, we have the first development in our Lord's teaching on the doctrine of God. He has taught the existence of Two on the level of divinity. Beside the Father He has set the Son.

(2) We pass to the second and final development in our Lord's teaching. Naturally the magnitude of His claim about Himself, and the difficulty of realising it, compelled Him to make it the principal theme in His instructions to the Twelve during the greater portion of His ministry. Toward the close of that period, however,

¹ Cf. S. John xvi. 28.

a further development appears. And this development is recorded precisely where it must have come, if it came at all : namely, in the last conversations with the Twelve. This is what the historian narrates and certainly what the logical order of things demands. In these last conversations, then, He speaks not only of the Father and of Himself, but He introduces, in connection with them, a Third Name—that of the Holy Spirit. Language unheard before now appears. Christ speaks of ‘the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My Name.’¹ He mentions Three—‘the Holy Ghost,’ ‘the Father,’ ‘Myself’: distinct yet associated. Then again, ‘But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth which proceedeth from the Father . . .’² The order is different, but the Names recur: ‘I,’ ‘the Father,’ ‘the Spirit of Truth.’ In the former passage it is said of the Spirit, ‘whom the Father will send

¹ S. John xiv. 26.² xv. 26.

in My Name'; in the latter, 'whom I will send unto you from the Father.' Thus the mission of the Spirit is ascribed indifferently either to the Father or to the Son—a remarkable implication of equality.

To complete this summary of our Lord's teaching on the doctrine of God must be added the saying of the Great Forty Days—'baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.'

'Viewed as a dogmatic development there is a singular appropriateness in the use of the phrase by our Lord at this precise stage in His instructions of the Apostles.'¹ Already He had constantly spoken of the Son and of the Spirit. 'Already, according to S. John, He had gathered in one the Holy Three just where the natural process of development in teaching would lead Him to such a course, that is to say, in the last instructions before the Passion to the inner circle of the Twelve.' He now gives the

¹ Cf. 'Our Lord's Resurrection,' Appendix on Baptismal formula.

final completion to that teaching. For He now takes the dogmatic conceptions taught in the last hours of His ministry and transfers them into the region of devotion and practice, in the form of a sacred rite. This triple Name is to be constantly associated with each individual regeneration and reception into the Body of Christ.

And this conjunction of the Three for use at such an hour must imply an identity in the nature of the Three so joined together. Criticism from outside the Church has constantly laboured to make it credible that the Union of these Three in such a formula does not necessarily imply their divinity, or equality, or personality. The second of the Names has been asserted to be that of a merely human instrument, the third an impersonal influence, and the whole triad has been so reduced that we could only be said, as Frederick Denison Maurice sarcastically observed, to be baptized in the name of an abstraction, a man, and a metaphor. But the solemn co-ordination of these three

titles is the strongest protest against their unreality. Nothing can justify the reduction of any of the Three to the level of mere figures of speech. Nothing can justify the elevation of any person less than divine into such levels of companionship with the Eternal Father. We remark that the author of this first Gospel was a Jew, with a Jew's instinctive shrinking from anything which would even seem to infringe the unapproachable oneness of God. We notice that the formula does not say "in the *Names* of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Such language might perhaps have suggested the separate character of the Three associated. But, as we all know quite familiarly, such language is not used. There is no plurality here. It is 'in the *Name* of'—singular. The result is to bind the Associated Three inseparably together.

The force of this association may be better appreciated by substituting other persons in the formula in place of the Son and the Holy Ghost. Imagine the formula

to have run in the following terms: in the Name of the Father, and of S. Paul, and of Love. Does not the Christian consciousness instinctively recoil from such a union? And why? Because this association of a divine Person with a mere human being followed by an impersonal quality would be at the same time irrational and irreverent: irrational because the impersonal quality of Love cannot act by itself, is included in God, and when separated in this abstract way it only detracts from the thought of the personal God whose attribute it is; irreverent because it puts a mere creature, however excellent and valuable—namely, S. Paul—into dangerous proximity with the Uncreated God. It recalls at once S. Paul's own horrified protest, 'was Paul crucified for you? or were you baptized into the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you but Crispus and Gaius, lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name.' ¹

This protest of S. Paul may enable us

¹ 1 Cor. i. 13-15.

to form some impression what the association of these Three in one formula would mean in the apostolic age.

It has been most truly said by a learned writer who is certainly under no traditional bias,—‘The Catholic dogma already emerges on the horizon in the Trinitarian formula of baptism.’¹

2. From the creative period of our Lord’s instructions to the Twelve we pass to the result in the instructions given by the Apostles.

(1) The following are illustrations. S. Peter describes the Christian as ‘elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the Blood of Jesus Christ.’² Here the Apostle’s doctrine of Redemption is thrown into a triple form. Three distinct gifts are possessed by the Christian. They are election, sanctification, and sprinkling (or Redemption). And with these three gifts three divine

¹ Pfleiderer, ‘Gifford Lectures,’ ii. 35.

² 1 S. Peter i. 2.

names correspond : Father, Spirit, and Jesus Christ. To God the Father is ascribed the election of the Christian, to Jesus Christ the accomplishment of the elective purpose by redemptive Sacrifice, to the Spirit the inward completion by conferring actual sanctification on the individual life. Accordingly S. Peter's entire doctrine of Redemption is based on a Trinitarian conception of God.¹

And this is a perfectly natural sequel to the teaching of his Master. He who heard as a disciple our Lord's teaching about the Son and the Spirit would readily reproduce what he had assimilated in some such form as this.

Very similar is the language of S. Jude :
' But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.'²

The prominence given here to the Holy

¹ Cf. Lange, *in loc.*

² S. Jude 20, 21

Trinity—‘Holy Ghost,’ ‘God,’ ‘our Lord Jesus Christ’—should not be overlooked.¹

The writings of S. John have given us most of the Trinitarian utterances which we possess from our Lord’s own lips, but the Apostle has not formulated the doctrine independently for himself. The passage on the heavenly witnesses: ‘For there are three that bear record in Heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these Three are One,’² is universally admitted to be an interpolation, resting chiefly on the authority of the Spanish Polyglot Bible of the sixteenth century published by Cardinal Ximenes,³ and on the authority of Erasmus, who inserted the verse under pressure of the Church, but with obvious misgivings, in a later edition of his New Testament. It is found in the Latin Version of the Scriptures.⁴ But it is impossible to say from what source it was derived, for it is

¹ Cf. Lange. ² 1 S. John v. 7.

³ See Hefele, ‘Life of Cardinal Ximenes,’ French Trans., p. 160.

⁴ Cf. Wordsworth, *in loc.*

not to be found in any ancient form of the original Greek. It is never appealed to during the first three hundred years by any Christian writer as an authority for the Church's faith. And it seems almost incredible, considering its strength and clearness, that its presence in the New Testament should never have been appealed to if it were really there. We ought not to be surprised if, in the beginnings of criticism, the ablest men made great mistakes,¹ especially since the words do most assuredly express what other statements of S. John imply. Nevertheless their insertion is very greatly to be deplored, for it gave the authority of Scripture to a phrase to which such authority does not belong. The text is accordingly omitted in the English Revisers' Version, and cannot legitimately be employed as part of the Scripture evidence. But if these words are not S. John's, yet his testimony is really beyond

¹ See Dorner, 'History of the Development of the Doctrine of the Person of Christ,' Appendix last vol., p. 422.

dispute. For in the same Epistle he says, 'our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ' ¹ and again, 'Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.' ² Here, then, S. John falls into Trinitarian phrase—'the Spirit,' 'Jesus Christ,' 'God.'

Let us next illustrate the teaching from S. Paul. 'Through Him [*i.e.* Christ] we both [*i.e.* Jews and Greeks] have access in one Spirit unto the Father.' ³ Every word of this short sentence is deeply significant. We both—Jew and Greek—united as Christian men, have access to God; and that access is in the Spirit, through the mediation of Christ, unto the Father as its final end and consummation. Observe that all the prepositions are different. It is *through* Christ, *in* the Spirit, *unto* the Father. Christ is the instrument who

¹ 1 S. John i. 3.

² 1 S. John iv. 2.

³ Eph. ii. 18; cf. 19, 22.

obtains it, the Spirit the power who bestows it, the Father the goal of all this endeavour.

But the most striking Trinitarian reference in S. Paul is the passage made so familiar by association with the Church's daily prayer : ' The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost.'¹

Here are enumerated three divine qualities—grace, love, communication. Each of them is ascribed to a distinct divine Person. Grace to Jesus Christ, because it is by His gracious free redemptive work that our salvation is possible. Love is ascribed to God, *i.e.* the Father, because it is the Father's love which prompted salvation and provided the means. Love sent His Son to be our Redeemer. The love of God is the principal cause of the grace of Christ. Communication is ascribed as the distinctive function of the Holy Spirit, because He confers the gifts which Christ obtained.²

¹ 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

² Cf. Cornely, *in. loc.*, Meyer.

Thus the whole process of salvation is summed up in three terms and ascribed to Three whose distinctiveness is suggested in the separate part They take, and whose Unity is implied in Their co-operation, and in the nature of Their work.

(2) These, then, are illustrations of the apostolic doctrine of God. If we endeavour to describe the impression they leave on us we should say that we find here a perfectly natural reflection of the Mind of Christ, a reproduction of the conception of God progressively learnt from Him. We notice, above all, that the apostolic doctrine is instinctively formulated in Trinitarian phrases. Such language comes to the Apostles without an effort; it is the natural expression of their thought. And this is exactly what we might expect from men who heard Christ's instructions on His own Sonship and on the work of the Holy Spirit. Now, simple as these phrases are in form, they are profound in substance.

This frank and fearless co-ordination of

the Son and the Spirit with the Father implies much more than it asserts : it implies equality. To say that the Apostles were more concerned to express their sense of the uniqueness of Christ's character than of the nature of His Person, is to fail to realise what must have been a Jew's intuition in this fearful elevation of names into union with that of the uncreated God. No conceivable uniqueness of character could have induced a Jew to unite a human person and a holy influence with the awful, unapproachable God ; for no conceivable uniqueness could for a moment justify such procedure. Thus the implications of the apostolic language are in advance of their explicit statements.

At the same time there is a remarkable absence from the apostolic writings of any speculative endeavour to adjust this Trinitarian phraseology with the Hebrew Monotheism out of which it sprang. The Apostles do not attempt an intellectual reconstruction of Theism. They do not

strive to satisfy the inquiry, in what sense God is One and in what sense Three. They provide no theoretical explanation of this sacred relationship within the Unity. But the reason is, not because they failed to realise the immensity of their advance beyond the traditional Monotheistic faith: it is rather because they are so wholly absorbed in the magnitude of the Incarnation that their mental energies are exclusively devoted to the task of giving to this historic fact an adequate expression. Hence it is that, while they give no theoretic system of the Trinity, they nevertheless employ terms which nothing but the literal divinity of more than one Person could conceivably justify; and when S. John employs the term 'the Word,' he manifestly indicates substantial identity between Father and Son. Thus on the one hand they involve themselves in implications and positions wholly repugnant to the peculiar Monotheism of the Jew, while on the other they give no systematic shape to the ultimate principles. But all this is most significant

of a stage in the process of an historic evolution.

This characteristic of advancement yet incompleteness is, surely, deeply instructive. It would seem intellectually impossible that none of the problems involved in this advance presented themselves to men in whom the conception of divine Unity was ingrained with the combined force of an immemorial inheritance and a personal conviction. Every instinct and passion of the disciplined Jew rose in rebellion against the least deviation from the doctrine of the strictest Unity. If the Apostles extended this conception and proclaimed God in Trinitarian phrase, the immense deviation and advance can only be explained by the splendour of the revelation given. It was due to the convincing force of the testimony of Jesus Christ and the necessities of the Christian doctrine of Redemption by the Son and sanctification by the Spirit.

This brings us to our final point.

The doctrine of the triune God presented

itself to them in a devotional, spiritual, practical way.¹ It is revealed in the process of Redemption. The first believers contemplated God as Fatherhood yielding its Best-beloved, Love prompting Redemption and providing from Itself the means. They saw Redemption wrought out by a Person whose character, claims, and work alike attest Him to be divine. They experienced the Redemption in themselves individually by the sanctification of their whole nature through the Holy Spirit. Thus the doctrine of the Trinity was religiously conceived. To think Redemption Christianly was to think the Trinity. God could not appear to them other than triune. To think Him otherwise would be to abandon their own deliverance, which rested essentially on these distinctions. The eternal existence of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was the basis of all that was distinctively Christian in their experience and therefore in their faith.

It is essential to dwell on this. The

¹ Cf. Frank, 'System of Christian Certainty.'

doctrine of the Trinity was originally realised by men chiefly through the Christian conception of Redemption.

This suggests the thought that their connection is of primary importance and that the former will not be appreciated without the latter. Inability to realise the Trinity may be due to failure to grasp the Christian doctrine of Redemption. A thoughtful writer, speaking of certain teachers in the eighteenth century says : ‘ The doctrine of the Trinity, in proportion as it was dissociated from the related doctrines of the guilt of sin, atonement by the blood of Christ, and regeneration by the Holy Ghost, necessarily lost its importance to men’s view, and in great measure also was kept apart from the intelligible forms through which alone it could distinctly body itself forth to their apprehensions. For such a religion as ministers of the Gospel then taught and exemplified there was no proper need for a Trinity ; it hung around their faith as a superfluous or rather troublesome encum-

brance, enveloping it in mysteries which might be dispensed with and raising questions which it seemed alike needless and impossible to answer.¹ So it came to be seen that the true doctrine of Redemption and the doctrine of the Godhead must stand or fall together.'

¹ Appendix to Dorner, 'Person of Christ'; last vol., p. 405.

II.

THE FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH IN FORMULATING THE DOCTRINE OF GOD.

II.

THE FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH IN FORMULATING THE DOCTRINE OF GOD.

IT is constantly said that there is a very marked difference between the language of the Bible and the language of the Creeds in statements of faith. The author of a much-read book, 'The Diary of a Church-goer,'¹ divides the Creeds into two classes. In the one he places the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene, and informs us that, while he does not accept every article of either, yet he 'bows before the simplicity, the strength, and the seriousness of these formularies.' He admits that the Nicene Creed, which apparently he likes the less, is the utterance of 'passionate believers inspired with an intense sense of a living doctrine.'

¹ Page 69.

But the formula which goes by the title of Athanasian, even apart from its 'damnatory' clauses, is to him 'the outcome of a collaboration of minds moving in barren intellectual exercises aloof from love and grace and fellowship.' To his mind, 'it is not a psalm of life. Dead in its origin, it has a savour of death.'¹ But, while he owns to a modified respect for the other forms of Creed, his real admiration is for the language of Scripture. 'There are phrases of Scripture filled with an indefinable and inexhaustible fascination,' while the passage from Scripture to the Athanasian Creed is described as a transition in which 'the inexpressibly odious had taken the place of the inexpressibly divine.'²

Undoubtedly we have here a forcible expression of a prevalent opinion; and, while dissociating ourselves as widely as possible from the shape which these remarks have taken, and also setting aside this progressive classification of the Creeds,

¹ 'The Diary of a Church-goer,' p. 69. ² *Ibid.*, p. 68.

it is important to recognise the substantial truth that there is a very striking difference between the language of Scripture and the language of the Church's formularies on the Christian doctrine of God. There is a difference in form and phraseology ; there are technical words contained in the Creeds which are not exactly contained in the Bible. But the difference is deeper than the mere use of different expressions. There is a marked difference in definiteness, in systematic construction, in the view of the relation between one truth and another. The statements of the Creeds are much more elaborated, sharp, clear-cut than many in Scripture. They explain the relation of truth with truth as the Scriptures do not. They are 'intellectual exercises' ; there is in their formation a 'collaboration of minds.' With this we fully agree. But we hope to show that no man ought to account them 'barren,' or to find them 'inexpressibly odious.'

Now to understand this remarkable difference between the Scripture and the

Creeds we must remember the nature of the Scripture Revelation about God : that Revelation did not come in the shape of a ready-made systematic announcement, complete and finished all at once ; on the contrary, it was gradual and progressive. On the basis of the Fatherhood of God, our Lord proclaimed the existence of a corresponding Sonship, unique in kind, eternal in its nature ; and the Occupant of that unique position was, with increasing clearness, demonstrated to be Himself. Then, later, came the declaration of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Accordingly two truths about God's nature were deeply planted in the minds of the Twelve : first, the Divinity of the Son ; secondly, the personality of the Spirit ; and both on the basis of the Fatherhood of God. Then this progressive Revelation was left to fructify under the influence of grace. Then it became reproduced in the apostolic teaching. The Apostles proclaimed a doctrine of Redemption, and they proclaimed it in Trini-

tarian phraseology. They are above all things concerned with the Person of Christ and His redemptive work. They are concerned with Him as God manifest in the flesh. But it must be recognised that the Apostles make no attempt intellectually to co-ordinate the various elements of the revealed truth. All the elements of the full Trinitarian doctrine of God are certainly there ; but they are not drawn out, nor compared, nor adjusted, nor systematised, nor intellectually explained.

The characteristic of the Scripture Revelation as fragmentary and progressive is strongly urged by leading teachers of our day. Thus Dr. Sanday speaks of the Scripture Revelation as being 'what we ought not to call the doctrine of the Trinity,' but, 'those root facts out of which the doctrine of the Trinity afterwards came to be formulated.'

'The fact is,' says Moberly, 'that the thought which dominates the minds of the apostolic writers is not so much the thought

of the eternal threefoldness of the being of God ; they are not thinking directly of the doctrine of the Trinity as such ; they are not thinking of the being of Godhead as such ; but they are thinking of the transcendent fact of the Incarnation of Deity in flesh.'

This progressive, unsystematic character of the Christian Revelation explains the necessity for further systematising and definition. It became the inevitable function of the Church to co-ordinate the various portions of truth, and to show their intellectual consistency.

No doubt this is precisely what a certain type of mind will deprecate. It will be objected, why attempt to define ? And we must acknowledge that there is such a thing as an excessive love of definition. It is certainly clear to the mind of any Catholic, except a Roman, that over-definition has brought disaster in its train. We see gifted persons to-day moving uneasily in the fetters of mediæval restrictions and obsolete meta-

physics, and cannot sufficiently express our thankfulness at our freedom from the same. Nevertheless, if over-definition is a calamity, obscurity is not a blessing. That which is to be an object of faith must be capable, to some extent at least, of being defined. The author of the 'Diary of a Church-goer' would prefer to leave the Scripture sentences which fascinate him unexplained. 'Even if we could explore their innermost recesses, it would perhaps be better to leave them unexamined.'¹ But this would encourage a sentimental rather than an intelligent religion. It would found religion on the precarious basis of the emotions, rather than on the solid ground of objective truth. After all, the intellect has its rights. It is easy to deprecate what the same author calls 'the plague of analysis.' But self-surrender to the 'indefinable and inexhaustible fascinations' of language, whose meaning the intellect is forbidden to explore, is a weakness which ought not to be encouraged. It

¹ Page 61.

has neither rational validity nor moral worth. We must recognise the unwisdom of a proposal which lays us open to the accusation, 'Ye worship ye know not what.' It is a principle essential to all true religious self-development that faith must seek to understand. To deprecate definition is to insinuate that the vague object of fascination can only exist so long as it continues undefined ; that it would vanish altogether if subjected to the clear scrutiny of reason. But such a religion can hardly be expected to last, and indeed, is little more than a shadow and a name. It is impossible for the deepest spiritual needs of human nature to be satisfied permanently with indefinable fascinations, and if experience teaches anything for certain, it is that a religion whose object is indefinite and vague is apt to leave men most completely in the lurch precisely in the hour of their deepest need.

The truth is that no conception whatever of God is exempt from the necessity of

definition and of inference. Definition is by no means a peculiar tendency of the Christian Faith. It is equally essential to any theory of the Divine. Put the conception in its simplest possible form. Say only that God exists. Does not that conception involve His Unity? Is not personality another dominant element in the idea of God? Does not personality imply reason and will? But these statements are indisputably intellectual. They are exercises of thought on the simple data of the affirmation that God exists. Are they 'barren exercises' of thought? Are they 'inexpressibly odious'? But are they any less certain than the data that God exists? Are they not really involved in the primary affirmation? Is it logically possible to retain belief in the postulate while rejecting the inference? Can I, as personally rational, put trust in a mere abstraction? Questions such as these may help to show that definition is not an addition arbitrarily imposed on primitive simplicity. It is the

elucidation of the original contents of the Faith.

Accordingly the difference between the language of Scripture and Creed is explained by the fact that they represent different stages in the process of the human apprehension and statement of revealed truth. In the Creed the intellectual form predominates, because this is the endeavour to give the contents of Revelation systematic shape ; to meet the inquiries of the human mind. The most intellectual form of Creed is, for the author of the ' Diary of a Church-goer,' a barren exercise. But while this assertion is psychologically interesting and important, as representing a certain type which the Church must take into account, it must be pleaded that men also exist to whom clear thought in religion is an intellectual necessity. They simply cannot exist on indefinable fascinations. And the example of John Henry Newman may remind us that some of the finest intellects are strengthened by these very phrases.

What our author characterises as inexpressibly odious they would exult in and characterise as inexpressibly divine.

I.

Here, then, comes into view the Function of the Church.

To make our subject clearer it will be well to consider what is meant by that often reiterated word. We are constantly told that 'the Church does this or that,' while the vaguest notions exist as to the Church's nature.

The difficulty to many men is that the individual seems to them the only reality. The Church seems a mere abstraction. To illustrate the reality of the Church we may turn for a moment to other spheres. In the social life there is the individual, but there is also the nation. And while the individual acts and resolves, so also does the nation. Its limits may not be very easy to define, but it is no abstraction ; it

is a very definite, concrete reality. Its corporate existence is a very obvious fact. So again it is with the home. There is the individual once more, but there is also the family. And the family, not the individual, is the true unit of mankind. The family is no abstraction, but a living entity. It has its corporate capacity, its principles, its life. In it the individual originates, develops, matures, achieves full stature. Without it he cannot.

Now what the family and the nation are in their respective ways, such, in the spiritual order, is the Church. It is no abstraction. It has a corporate capacity. It has its own laws and customs and principles. This brotherhood, this society—the Christian community—is an institution created by the Spirit of God to be, among other purposes, the recipient and expositor of Christian truth.

Christ did not simply declare the truth and then leave it homeless in the world. He created a society for the purpose of its protection and propagation. The doctrine

of God was a revelation given by Jesus Christ, entrusted to the keeping of the brotherhood which He founded. That revelation Christ impressed deeply upon the minds of the Twelve, and they, as we have seen, reproduced what they had taken in. Hence the Scriptures of the New Testament. The Church recognised the 'books which bore the signs of a real inspiration ;¹ it stamped them as canonical ; it accepted the New Testament as a whole. In doing so it did not complete the whole cycle of truth ; but it did assert that those books contain the foundation facts of its own life ; . . . it did say that these were its foundation doctrines.'² These foundation doctrines 'might not be contradicted.' The Book 'remained a standard of truth for all time.' The peculiarity of these writings is that they contain the direct reflection of minds formed by Christ. They give the original substance of the Christian

¹ Lock, 'The Bible and Christian Life.'

² *Ibid.*, p. 183.

Revelation. This Revelation so given was complete and therefore final. No newer revelation can be expected, or will be given. No subsequent voice can add to that doctrine once for all delivered.

But while the Church cannot add to, or in any way change the Revelation received, it was assuredly intended to study its contents and to gather together the various portions of truth. Christian thought was meant to concentrate itself upon the treasures of apostolic teaching. The Church, > that is, the collective Christian consciousness, was to give matured expression to the substance of the apostolic faith. The different fragments of a progressive instruction were to be collected, interpreted, and explained.

The Church was intended to co-ordinate the truths entrusted to its care ; to formulate the relationship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit ; to guard both sides of the central truth : the fact that God is One, and the fact that God is Three ; to explain the sense in which these truths are to be understood ;

to bring out, into explicit statement, what in apostolic teaching was implicitly involved.

The Church had received the facts, the first principles, of the Christian Revelation. It had received the great truth of the embodiment of Deity in flesh. It had been entrusted with the facts of the redemption of mankind wrought out through three Persons : the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. It found these Three united in Scripture phrases which imply far more than they assert. It was commanded to baptize in Their Name. And out of these data the Church had to formulate a system in which these various aspects and facts and principles should be taken into consideration.

This function of the Church is precisely what the modern mind has constantly forgotten.

The primary authority for the Christian doctrine of God is of course the original Revelation by Jesus Christ. The teaching of Christ and the Apostles must be sought from Holy Scripture. But it is by no

means sufficient that each individual should collect the passages or attempt to understand the various lines of apostolic thought for himself independently. Beyond the Bible which contains the Revelation, there is the historic Church which interprets the Revelation. There is the universal development of Christian thought. There is the historic interpretation which the collective Christian consciousness, matured and ripened by long reflection, has set upon the statement recorded. And for a man to shut his eyes to this, to endeavour independently to reconstruct a doctrine of God for himself out of the data of the Bible teaching, while ignoring the systematic evolution of Christian dogma in the history of the Church, is to deprive himself of the priceless labours of the Christian consciousness in expanding the original germs of the Christian truth. And while, of course, it is true that the Christian development of doctrine must constantly test itself by reversion to type, that is, by appeal to Holy Scripture, it is

not in the least true that men are to begin individually all over again, as if no Christian development had ever taken place; or that they have any right to confidence in their conclusions when those conclusions are at variance from the vast stream of Catholic tradition and interpretation. This assertion no doubt involves a belief in the Divine guidance of the collective consciousness of the Church. And if the collective consciousness is not guided, how can the individual hope to be?

II.

So far on the Church's function. We are next to describe the process in which the Church gave intellectual expression to its doctrine of God.

In the period next after the apostolic age the interests of the Church were on this subject more religious than intellectual. Men accepted the doctrine of Redemption, with its appeal to the conscience and the heart; they repeated the names of the Holy

Three in relation to different parts of this redemptive work. But they did not formulate with more than Scriptural completeness the relation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus, for instance, the language of S. Clement of Rome¹ is, ‘Have we not one God and one Christ, and one Spirit of Grace that was shed upon us?’ He makes this the ground of an appeal for unity. But he does little more than repeat the language of S. Paul.

But it was impossible that this simplicity of form should last. It was gradually required, partly by believers within the Church, partly by disputers without, that the inquiries of the reason should be met. Men must think. And as they thought they began to question. Believers could scarcely maintain for themselves, still less advocate before others, their fundamental principle, the Incarnation, without sooner or later being compelled to ask, In what relations does this truth stand to the truth of the Unity of God? ‘The Incarnation, along with the

¹ Ep. Cor. 46; ed. Bp. Lightfoot, p. 369.

doctrine of the Unity of God, is,' says Harnack, 'the fundamental dogma.' Precisely so. And the relationship between them was a question which had to come. It could not possibly be evaded. The activities of the intellect could not be fenced off from such inquiries, could not be ordered to divert themselves to another field, or informed that on subjects such as these reflection is sin. It became essential to explain with precision what it was that the Catholic Religion contained. And this task engaged the mind and taxed the resources of the Church until generations expanded into centuries. As Christian reflection was concentrated on the treasures of apostolic teaching, as the Incarnation became more deeply studied within and disputed from without, the simpler apostolic phrases in which the doctrine of the Trinity is implied, rather than asserted, were more and more deeply apprehended in the Christian consciousness, and as a result the only possible conclusion was achieved, which is the definite,

explicit formulation of the Trinitarian Creed.

To appreciate the process by which the language of Scripture on the doctrine of God was developed into the language of the Creeds, it is necessary to remember the fact that the Christian religion arose in Hebrew ground. It was primarily clothed in Semitic expressions. This does not mean that it was vague or fluid, or destitute of clear conceptions on the nature of God. No doubt the genius of the Hebrew was religious rather than logical, but probably no people ever had a clearer conception of the sharp distinction between the human and the Divine. If it was not their genius to give systematic form to the rational grounds of Theism, no people saw more distinctly, or recoiled with stronger repugnance from, the abyss which severs the monotheistic from polytheistic conceptions. And, similarly, when the primitive Christian spoke of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, he was certainly no less aware than we

are of the immense departure from Hebrew Monotheism which such co-ordination involved.

But while Trinitarianism in all its essential elements originated in Hebrew soil, the Hebrew phrases are neither the only possible, nor the most subtle, nor the best suited to the task of providing complete intellectual expression for the profoundest conceptions of the Christian Faith. There was prepared—we must assuredly add providentially—an instrument of thought, the most acute and subtle which the world has known—the language and philosophy of the Greek—to be the medium for the communication of Christianity to the world. The educated world at the beginning of the Christian era was Greek. Christianity must be made intelligible to the educated world. Accordingly it must be clothed in forms which Greek culture could understand.

Of course this transition had its beginning in the apostolic times. S. Paul himself had led the way. ‘He became,’ says

Harnack, 'a Greek to the Greeks, and even began the undertaking of placing the treasures of Greek knowledge at the service of the Gospel.'¹ And, however limited, in Harnack's view, this process in S. Paul's case was, yet, as he assures us, at any rate, 'as a missionary and an apologist he made use of Greek ideas. He was not afraid to put the Gospel into Greek modes of thought.'²

A further stage was reached in the preface to the Gospel of S. John. There we find the expression 'the Word.' Now, beyond dispute the modern critic would be rigidly incredulous if the Gospel had ascribed this expression to Jesus Christ. He might challenge the existence of such a phrase in Palestinian thought. But with an insight and consistency which has won the admiration of the critical, S. John never once places that phrase on the lips of Christ.³ He con-

¹ 'Hist. of Dogma,' i. 56, cf. p. 48.

² *Ibid.*, 49, *n*

³ Cf. Jülicher, 'Introd. N.T.'

finer it to the introduction, and never inserts it in the record of actual events. And whatever motives may have contributed to its deliberate selection, one at least was certainly this : it was an Alexandrian expression. It was familiar in the intellectual circles of the time. It was calculated to convey more readily than other phrases the true conception of the equality of Jesus with God. To one who had passed beyond the narrower confines of Palestinian life, and had become for years familiarised with the language of a wider world, no selection would be more appropriate and more natural. But it was prophetic of further and larger transferences yet to come.

Christians born in Greek surroundings, and versed in Greek methods, would naturally present Christian truth in Greek expressions. Greek philosophy provided the forms in which the new religion became the property of the civilised world. It is quite true, if rightly understood, that 'Greek philosophy furnished the abstract conceptions and the

dialectical method.'¹ It is quite true that Alexandria, where Hebrew met Greek, was the place of 'the mixing of the peoples.' It is true that the apostolic conceptions were systematised in the profoundest thought of the ancient world, and that in consequence there came about a re-statement of the Apostolic Faith. But it cannot be too plainly said that re-statement is not substitution. And that this process was re-statement, and not substitution, appears indisputable when it is remembered that the outcome is a system of thought which is anything but Greek.² As Loisy truly says, what is certain is that the primitive Christian tradition was not exchanged for philosophy; nor was Greek thought substituted for the Gospel; nor was Plato taken as a master in the place of Christ. If it is, from an historical standpoint, correct to say that the doctrines of

¹ Pfleiderer, 'Philosophy and Development of Religion,' ii. 224.

² Loisy, 'L'Évangile et l'Église,' p. 185-6, edit. 3.

the Trinity and Incarnation are Greek, in the sense that their intellectually completed affirmation is due to the thought of the Greek, yet assuredly these doctrines are not theories taken over from Pagan thought into Christian theology. If it is true that Israelite Monotheism did not expand into Christian Trinitarianism without the influence of Greek speculation, it is also most certainly true that the data of this evolution, the doctrine of Divine Unity, and the existence of the Holy Three, are given by tradition and Christian experience. Thus, neither the doctrine of the Trinity nor of the Incarnation are in their substance derived from Greek thought. In fact, the peculiar characteristics of Greek speculative thought, such as the vague conception of personality, the indefinite relation between God and the world, the theory of the world's eternity, are exactly what Christianity in its Greek clothes has never reproduced. Greek is the vehicle for the communication of Christian principles, but it is not the substance of the

communication. There was no intrusion of Alexandrian metaphysics into the province of Semitic thought, if by that phrase be intended that apostolic conceptions became thereby transmuted into something other than their real selves, disguised, distorted, perverted, losing their own identity. In Harnack's outlook on Christian history the whole development is one long deviation from original principle and substitution of one conception for another. But it is this only because his Unitarian prepossessions preclude the recognition of anything in the Gospel of Jesus beyond trust in the Fatherhood of God. But in that case departure from first principles and substitution of an alien theory was not first begun by educated Greeks; it is a work to which S. Paul and the author of the Fourth Gospel are already committed. All that was really done by the thought of the ancient world was to furnish new terms and to systematise the data of the Faith. The sign was different, the thing signified was the same.

Even writers who dispute this nevertheless employ language which virtually admits it. Dr. Hatch, whose Hibbert Lectures on the influence of Greek ideas on the Christian Church made considerable stir after their publication in 1888, is really unable, when it comes to the point, definitely to indicate any doctrine not originally apostolic, but introduced through the influence of Greek thought. He acknowledges that the Greek element in primitive Christian communities consisted 'less in an absorption of speculations than of the tendency to speculate.'¹ The residuum of permanent effect was mainly a certain habit of mind. It is not, then, the introduction of unapostolic conceptions into the Faith; it is only that 'there was a tendency to throw ideas into a philosophical form.' But to say this is to acknowledge the substantial identity of the Faith in its Greek form. All it can mean is that the intellect claimed its rights and exercised them on the data of the Faith.

¹ Hatch, 'Hibbert Lectures,' p. 133.

Accordingly Dr. Hatch, while he greatly laments this introduction of definition and speculation, nevertheless writes a remarkable sentence in which he acknowledges its use : 'It helped the Christian communities to believe as an intellectual conviction that which they had first accepted as a spiritual revelation.'¹

If we would describe more precisely wherein the distinctive features of the re-statement of Christian truth consisted we should say that it did two things: First, it clothed the Faith in other terms; it adopted the great words, Nature, Person, Substance, Trinity, as best adapted to give intelligible expression to the implicit faith of Apostles and Evangelists. And, secondly, it explained the relation of truth with truth. It drew out into the light what was half-concealed before. It gave explicit utterance to the implicit contents of the Scripture revelation. It made no sort of addition to the Faith; but it formulated their systematic connexion.

¹ Hatch, 'Hibbert Lectures,' p. 207.

Whatever be the authorship and the date of the words interpolated in the First Epistle of S. John, 'there are Three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these Three are One,' they are an endeavour of early Christian thought to combine two sides of Christian truth. Many such endeavours were made. Individual teachers and local churches drew out, formulated, and systematised the contents of the Christian doctrine of God.

III.

Next to thoughts on the process of the development, ought to come thoughts on the promoters of the process.

We must never forget that it was a process wrought through men, sharing therefore in much that this fact involves. At the same time it is our conviction that the process was divinely guided.

1. Among individual teachers who contributed most to bring the Christian

doctrine to complete expression, a leading place belongs to S. Athanasius. It was a true instinct which has for ever associated his name with the most definite and complete formula of Trinitarian Faith. Athanasius¹ taught that the Trinity was no mere verbal description of successive Divine activities, but inherent in the eternal being of God. He appealed to the baptismal formula as being an expression of what really exists in heaven. He laid, of course, supreme stress on the divinity of the Son, but he protested that unless the Spirit was equally divine there was no Trinity at all,² but only a duality ; and in that case the Spirit must be definitely set in the ranks of the created. He urged that baptismal regeneration in the triple Name could not possibly be justified unless the Spirit was identical in attributes with the Father and the Son.³ To deny the divinity of the Spirit, and yet to employ that formula, was to postulate an impossible equality

¹ Ep. i. to Serapion, vol. ii. p. 596, § 28.

² *Ibid.*, § 29.

³ *Ibid.*, § 30.

between the thing made and its Creator.¹ Athanasius appealed to the language of S. Paul in 2 Cor. xiii. 14 as involving the truth of the Trinitarian faith, for grace is the gift of the Holy Trinity, and it is given from the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. He taught that it followed from the very Christian conception itself of God, that the Trinity could not be divisible nor partially unlike;² but that its sanctity and eternal and immutable nature must be the very same. Athanasius moreover protested that his teaching on this great theme was not derived from sources external to the Christian truth; it was a reproduction of the apostolic faith, received by him through the Catholic tradition, and in complete accordance with the mind of Holy Scripture.³ This whole line of procedure is eminently characteristic of the method by which the Christian Faith achieved its ultimate expression.

¹ Ep. i. to Serapion, vol. ii. § 31.

² *Ibid.*, p. 600.

³ *Ibid.*, § 33, p. 605.

One other great name can never be omitted even from the merest outline of the development of this greatest of all subjects of human thought. It is the name of S. Augustine. His mighty religious genius contributed as much as any other individual to the complete definition of the Trinitarian faith.

It can scarcely surprise us if the statements of individuals were often inadequate and even misleading. Considering the stupendous magnitude of the theme, we cannot wonder in the least if their labours were not commensurate with their intentions. Great men of the early Church failed at times to see the heretical tendency of their admissions. They made assertions either partially incorrect or entirely inconsistent with the orthodox faith. They did not anticipate theories not yet arisen, nor guard their phrases against possible misapplication in the controversies yet to come. All this is intelligible enough. But the general drift of Christian thought is unmistakably clear.

It steadily moved in one determined way—the way determined by the data of the Christian revelation.

2. In addition to the influence of leading individuals there was the influence of the Councils in systematising and formulating the Faith. Their influence was unquestionably very great in determining the permanent forms of Christian Creed. Their affirmations are constantly depreciated to-day as mere utterances of majorities. 'The theory of Councils,' it is said, 'assumes that God never speaks to men except through the voice of the majority.'¹ But the student of history knows that the influence of the Councils in Christendom has never depended on their numerical strength. Small assemblies have become universally acknowledged, while some vastly larger have never gained such acceptance. The ultimate fate of Councils has really depended on the question whether they gave expression to the universal Christian sense.

¹ Hatch, 'Hibbert Lectures,' p. 331.

While we ascribe a leading place in formulating the doctrine of God to certain religious individuals of the highest rank, and to certain assemblies, it must not be supposed that these individuals or assemblies did more than give expression to the collective Christian consciousness. The Church in general accepted their words, whenever it did accept them, not merely out of deference to their authority, but from a conviction that their words gave utterance to the Christian consciousness at large. That is to say, that the Trinitarian doctrine is not the work of a few powerful dominating minds or Councils. It is the outcome of the whole vast stream of Christian reflection, the only possible outcome, given the data of the apostolic faith.

The collective Christian consciousness on this great theme has steadily moved in one direction. Doubtless local waves and subsidings, reactions and withdrawals, ebbs and flows, have taken place. Phrases like 'the world groaned to find itself Arian,' or

‘Athanasius against the world,’ may be adduced to exemplify vast deviations from the great flooding main of Christian development. But it is impossible, with any due regard for history, to characterise these as more than temporary subsidences, extensive yet limited aberrations, cross-currents in the great advance, whose real tendencies are unmistakable to all whose outlook over the prospect is sufficiently comprehensive.

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.¹

If, then, the decisions of the Council of Nicæa in 325 have given to Christendom the phrase ‘of one substance with the Father,’ and the Council of Constantinople in 381 the concluding clauses of the Creed on the divinity of the Holy Ghost, this is not because a political power forced the sentence of the majority on a reluctant Christendom

¹ Clough, ‘Say not the Struggle naught availeth.’

half convinced. It is simply because those decisions did but formulate what Christendom at large and as a whole felt instinctively, but possibly was unable to express. It was nothing more than an embodiment, in technical terms, of convictions with which the collective Christian consciousness had been virtually all along identified.

IV.

Another element yet remains which contributed considerably to the development of the Faith, namely, the influence of Error.

It is commonly and truly said that, left to itself, the Church exhibited no anxiety to define. Definition beyond a certain point is scarcely necessary where the faith is universally received. But definition becomes compulsory when the truth is misrepresented. The teaching of error necessitates further restatements of truth. The simplest statement of a Christian truth may be adequate

until false theory has arisen. But the moment conflicting theories become influential the simple statement becomes inadequate to meet them. All history testifies that dogmatic definitions have been called out in response to deviations.

The Christian thought which formulated the Trinitarian doctrine in its most complete and systematic shape was undoubtedly quickened by the opposition of non-Christian opinions. All sorts of theories arose in the early centuries subversive of fundamental Christian principles; and the Church was compelled to define the truth in self-defence and as a protection to believers. Men whose fundamental principles were irreconcilable with those of the Religion of the Incarnation were, nevertheless, attempting incongruously to assimilate certain elements of Christian truth. They reconstructed the Christian doctrine of God until they propounded its exact negation, while still desiring to retain the name of Christian. Against all this the Church was

bound to reaffirm the unalterable principles of the Christian Revelation.

Church history of the early centuries shows that the tendency of human thought on this great subject of the Three Persons was, as might be expected, to run into one or other of two extremes.

One erroneous extreme was the error of identifying the Three Persons. Men taught that God, considered in Himself, is but one substance and one Person ; but, considered in relation to the human race, He appears in three successive historic self-manifestations adapted to three periods in the development of the process of redemption. He legislates ✓ as a Father in the ancient covenant, ✓ He incarnates Himself in the capacity of a Son in the new revelation, He ✓ illuminates the Apostles and the Church in the character of the Holy Spirit. But these three forms are purely transient adaptations of the one divine Person to the varying requirements of human life. The Three are like three rays of the sun. But

the essential characteristic of God's personality is unity.¹

No doubt this theory was well meant.² These men were Unitarians at heart. They did not see how it was possible to maintain the Divine Unity in any other way than by affirming that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one and the self-same Person.³ They certainly secured the Unity, but they surrendered the Trinity. Of course this asserted identity of the Three Persons is the ruin of the Christian doctrine of Redemption. All that is distinctively Christian in the scheme of Redemption vanishes away. There is no meaning left in the statement that 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son'; that He 'sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins'; that through Christ we have 'access by one Spirit unto the Father.' It acknowledged, indeed,

¹ Cf. Lichtenberger, 'Encyclopédie des Sciences Religieuses,' s.v. 'Sabellianisme.'

² Grétilat, 'Dogmatique,' iii. 189.

³ See Tertullian, 'Adv. Prax,' ch. ii.

that the Word was God, but it left no room for the fact that the Word was with God. It demonstrated the impossibility of doing justice to Scripture while affirming that God is only one in Person. For assuredly the Apostles and Evangelists do not describe the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost as three successive disguises or representations on earth of a single Personality in heaven. It seems inconceivable that any one could fail to realise this unless predetermined by a belief that God is one Person and no more. This revelation of personality in a triple form must undoubtedly correspond with a triple heavenly reality. God is revealed as Three because he is Three, neither more nor less.

The opposite extreme into which human thought may easily go is the error of separating the Three Persons so completely as to make the nature of the Father different from the nature of the Son. Such separation would maintain the Trinity, but sacrifice the Unity. It must be confessed that, in their anxiety to emphasise the distinction of the

Three Persons, Christian writers have been constantly liable to the charge of asserting three divinities.

Christian thought, then, required to formulate its faith in terms avoiding both these two extremes ; recognising the true element in both and avoiding the error. This difficult task was splendidly achieved. These Three are One, said the theologian. And when asked, In what sense do you say the Three are One ? the answer was : Three in Person and One in Nature.

This distinction of nature and person is borrowed from the deepest ancient thought. It is a distinction which made much intelligible which would otherwise have been impenetrably obscure. It is not meant for a moment that the difficulties are removed. All that is asserted is that they become thereby greatly lightened. There can be no doubt that in utilising this distinction the Trinitarian doctrine was commended to the more thoughtful of the early centuries. And it is clear that rejections of the

doctrine, even to the present day, begin by ignoring or misunderstanding what the distinction really is.

And so we reach the great phrases of the Athanasian formula, in which the *via media* between the two erroneous extremes finds final expression : ‘neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance.’ And here, as an historic fact, the development of the Christian doctrine of God ceased. It ceased because it had reached its consummation. The implicit had been drawn out, defined and co-ordinated. The privilege of the Church henceforth was to rejoice in the fullness of its realised possession.

V.

The function of the Church on the data of the Faith has given rise to objections in very different quarters.

1. There is the objection of the liberal theologian. Fully recognising the process by which Hebrew ideas appeared in Greek

translation, why, it is asked, should we attach any permanence to the form in which the doctrine was clothed in patristic and mediæval times? Conceding that the phrases may have done valuable service in their day, why be enslaved to them now? May not the present utility of these expressions be in inverse proportion to their ancient worth? If Christian truth required to be stated in the terminology of Greek thought in order to become intelligible to a primitive world, may it not require to be *restated* in some other terminology, more acceptable to modern ideas? Abolition, therefore, of obsolete formulas, restatement of ancient truth, reconstruction of traditional schemes, appears a perfectly natural process, justified by the very treatment which the Hebrew ideas received centuries ago at the hands of the subtle Greek.

By all possible means, we would answer, let the Faith be restated in such terms as will render it intelligible to modern thought. Unquestionably it is the Church's duty to

interpret the Faith to every age, to clothe it in such forms as shall reach the apprehension of successive generations. But let it be really restated. The restatement of a truth means the reassertion of the *same* truth, not the substitution of another in its place. To offer men the humanitarian Jesus in place of the Christ of Christendom is not restatement: it is substitution of one religion for another. To give us an infinite lonely Mind in place of the social Trinity is not to restate that doctrine: it is to efface it, and to replace it by that which is its entire negation. Whatever be the form of their expression, there are certain unalterable facts and truths, certain doctrines and principles essential to the very existence of Christianity. Their removal is not restatement: it is the introduction of an antagonistic series of doctrines and principles. The effect of recent criticism, too often, is to produce a vague impression that everything in theology is fluid and undetermined. Yet very little reflection should suffice to

dissipate this illusion. Whether the Old Testament teaches that God is personal is not really open to dispute. And whether the New Testament, as it stands, teaches the data inevitably involving Trinitarianism is no more open to uncertainty. Vagueness may exist in individual modern minds. But vagueness does not really exist in the Scripture statements. The only open course, in rational consistency, is restatement of apostolic faith unchanged in modern terms, or frank abandonment of the apostolic position. The question of abandonment is here deliberately set aside. But if modern thought can supply new phrases as competent to express the Trinitarian Faith as the language and thought of Greece, by all means let it produce them. Will it then be necessary to set aside the ancient creeds? We might leave that to be considered when the time arrives. Meanwhile we cannot conceal from ourselves the fact that the thought and language of that ancient world was the

most subtle and profound that the world had yet known. And also that the phrases which, as a matter of fact, have interpreted Christianity to mankind during some fifteen hundred years, during three quarters, that is, of its entire existence as yet, can never be set aside without involving results from which all believers in real evolution must shrink, and can never cease to be a true interpretation of the primitive data of the Christian Faith.

2. Another very important objection must be noticed in conclusion. What we have traced is a process of development. There is undoubtedly a marked advance from the Scripture statement to the statement of the creeds. There has been a development in the doctrine of the Trinity. And it is urged upon us by Roman writers of to-day that if we admit the principle of development on the fundamental doctrine of God, we cannot consistently refuse to acknowledge it in certain other doctrines also, such as that the Blessed Virgin Mary was im-

maculately conceived, and that the occupant of the See of Rome is infallible when pronouncing officially in matters of faith and morals.

But the distinction lies in this: the development in the Trinitarian doctrine is nothing more than the systematic assertion of what is involved in Scripture teaching. It is impossible logically to retain a hold on Scripture without it. Every detail of the final Catholic statement about God is implicitly included in the simple formula of Baptism. It is all there. No essential alteration is made by the statements of the Creed. But the development which, after eighteen hundred years, culminated in affirming papal infallibility is a totally different thing. For it is not necessarily implied by any Scripture statement whatever. It is not the only inference consistent with belief in Scripture. That this is the case is demonstrated by the fact that a different principle prevailed in the early centuries, has prevailed all through, and still prevails in many parts of

Christendom to-day : a principle which places the ultimate authority elsewhere, and not in the hands of any solitary successor of the Apostles.

3. There remains a still more radical objection to the use of dogma as an instrument in religion. Harnack protests that 'every dogmatic formula should be an object of suspicion.' It is calculated to wound the spirit of religion. It should not be put before the living experience in order to evoke it, 'for such a procedure is really the admission of the half-belief which thinks it necessary that the impression made by the person must be supplemented.'¹ Religion is here viewed on its experimental side. It is the impression made by the Person of Christ upon the individual beholder. It is the living experience awakened by becoming really vividly confronted with Jesus Christ. This experience apparently, in Harnack's view, is adequate and complete. Dogma is not only superfluous but positively a

¹ 'Hist. Dogm.,' i. 71.

half-belief intruding into the sacred region of religious experience. To introduce dogma would be to wound the spirit of religion. For such an introduction would be an endeavour to supplement the impression made by the Person of Christ, as if that impression were insufficient. But this would manifestly be prompted by unbelief in the power of the Person to produce its own adequate result. Accordingly we should let the Person of Christ produce its effect on the individual without any dogmatic supplementing. It needs no supplementing. The individual who experiences the impression will himself put the true construction on his experience.

But will he? Does he? Alas for the theory! the individual does nothing of the kind. Harnack himself puts anything rather than the traditional, the Catholic construction on his own experience of the Person of Christ. The facts refute the theory. If to the impression made by the Person we add, as a supplement, the

proclamation of a dogma concerning Him, this is not due to any half-belief in the Person's impressiveness. It is due to recognition of the fact that there are endless degrees of individual receptiveness. The impressiveness of the Person is such that it ought indeed to carry the conviction of His divinity. The revelation made of His Person is the same for all the world. But the capacity of the individual recipients is not the same. What the individual can apprehend and appropriate may be but a fragment of the truth which is really revealed. The impression of the Person of Christ has always varied indefinitely. It varied indefinitely enough in the days of His flesh. Experience seldom enabled men to interpret fully or correctly at the time. They constantly failed to understand Him. And again, not through defective impressiveness of the Person, but through incompetence in the recipient of the impression.

If there is any certain lesson in religious

experience, it is the necessity of interpreting and explaining the impression which the Person of Jesus makes on the generality of men.

This interpretation is given sometimes by some religious specialist among mankind ; that is to say, by some individual more alive than ourselves to the realities of the spiritual world. He can see further and deeper than we because his sight is stronger and clearer than ours. Our faint surmises, our slow laborious inferences, are in him the rapidity of intuition, the certainty of unclouded sight.

So it is with the Church's proclamation of dogmatic truth. It is the function of the Church to assist our weakness. It must supplement the impression made by the Person of Christ. It presents us with the collective experience of the Christian consciousness. It preserves and records the intuitions and inferences of the vast Body and Society which has uniformly been recipient of that impression. And it does this, not from

faithless misgivings as to the impressiveness of the personality of Christ, but from its deep knowledge of human nature and frank misgivings, justified by long experience, as to individual competence to draw correctly the momentous conclusions.

III.

THE PERSONALITY OF GOD.

III.

THE PERSONALITY OF GOD.

GREAT attention has of late years been directed to the subject of personality. Set treatises upon it are of distinctly modern growth. It is not only that ancient thought had very vague conceptions of the matter, but the province was greatly neglected even down to recent times. It has now created a literature of its own. And it may well be that the increased psychological interest of the day may contribute to a better understanding of that difficult problem, what is a person?

By way of introduction let us emphasise two points :

1. First, personality is grander than space.

There have been times when the immensities of boundless *space* have over-

whelmed men's thoughts and crushed them down with a sense of utter insignificance, so that personality seemed eclipsed or lost, or attenuated into nothingness. It has seemed as if the real grandeur was that boundless immensity. Most men have probably at some time or another experienced thoughts like these. And there is an extraordinary grandeur in the study of innumerable worlds millions of miles apart, pursuing, at a speed inconceivable, a flight which is endless through interminable regions of space. The mind becomes bewildered before facts like these.

But this is, after all, only an appeal to the imagination. There is a grandeur which cannot be valued by the room it occupies in space. It is the grandeur of a being endowed with power to reason, to will, and to love. In brief, it consists in personality. Personality does not occupy space, and cannot be estimated according to material dimensions. But the grandeur of measureless extension cannot be compared with the

grandeur of one who is intellectual and moral.¹ It is perfectly true, as Pascal told us long ago, that it does not take much to extinguish the life of a human being, it does not require the united forces of nature to loosen his precarious tenure on the world or quench his earthly existence; one erratic drop of blood, one misplaced grain of sand, is sufficient to effect that. Nevertheless, the human being so destroyed is immeasurably grander than that which destroys him; for he can do what the Universe cannot, namely, think, and will, and love. The grandeur of personality is infinitely superior to that of space.

And this view of their relative importance increasingly prevails, as it always will, where moral interests predominate.

2. The second point is that personality is grander than abstract truth. There have been times when men thought that the ultimate realities were *ideas*. It seemed

¹ Pascal.

to them that there were certain truths whose characteristic it was to be eternal. The peculiar quality of such truths was that they never could be other than they are. This particular thing, they would say, is true. It is true for me and true for others. I did not make it true, I find it so. It is inconceivable that any lapse of time should make it cease to be true. Contrasted with these necessary eternal truths, what can be the value of personality? Persons come and go, arise and disappear. They are an endless succession. But while they incessantly change, truth remains.

Yes ; so it seems. But, after all, where do these truths reside? Ideas and truths cannot live in air. They cannot exist at all by themselves. It is not with truths as it is with evicted tenants. The evicted tenant suffers great privations through eviction, but at any rate he struggles on, and, if he is a homeless wanderer in the wild, he yet survives. But it is not so with truths.

They simply cannot exist at all without a mind to dwell in. If the mind turn again to his earth, then all his thoughts perish. If there is such a thing as eternal truth there must be an eternal Mind in which that truth resides. Where was that truth before it dwelt in the mind of man? Either it had no existence at all or else it existed in the mind of God. Hence the conception of eternal truth involves the conception of an eternal God. After all, then, personality is not inferior to truth. Ideas cannot exist without it. Here then, again, along this line, personality is obtaining its rights. Its supreme value is being more recognised than once it was.

So far, then, by way of introduction. We have seen two facts: personality is grander than space; personality is grander than abstract truth.

In fact we neither know nor can conceive existence in all the universe grander than personal.

I.

Now a study of personality would naturally begin with *personality in man*. For of human personality we know by direct experience : of divine we cannot. It is best, therefore, to approach the higher through the lower ; nay, we cannot know the higher except through the lower. It is only because we are personal ourselves that we possess any capacity for understanding personality in God. It would seem to follow that the more we understand personality in man the better we shall be prepared to approach the personality in God. If, then, our present consideration seem to take us far from the Christian doctrine of God, this is not really so. The study of human personality ought to prepare the way for the higher theme.

But what is personality? As every one knows, that is precisely the problem. Personality baffles definition. If I say that I am a person and that you are another,

we both understand what is meant by the statement, but we know that the ablest human thought is unable to define it. S. T. Coleridge¹ says that personality is individuality existing in itself but with a nature for its ground. The fact is, as probably the quotation suggests, that there is nothing which more completely defies definition. Another writer² says, 'A Person is a being conscious of self, subsisting in individuality and identity, and endowed with intuitive reason, rational sensibility, and free will. All beings constitutionally devoid of these characteristics are impersonal.'

1. Let us attempt to give some description of *its nature*. As a matter of experience every man may say, I recognise in my constitution various faculties, but these faculties are not mere isolated facts: they all belong to one and the same proprietor. I have passed through a long series of experiences, but these experiences are not a

¹ 'Literary Remains,' iii. 68.

² Harris, 'Philosophic Basis of Theism,' p. 408.

mere succession of incidents: they are all connected as being the experiences of one and the same subject. I have thought and I have acted, but these thoughts and actions are not disconnected and merely successive: they are *my* thoughts and *my* actions. I recognise them to belong to me, but they are not *me*. Now that in me which says I, the proprietor of all these faculties, is personality. Personality brings all these separated faculties, actions, thoughts, into unity. Personality is the connecting thread which makes them mine. The innermost centre of my being, from which everything radiates, towards which all experiences converge, is personality.¹

2. Such is its nature. But what instantly becomes obvious in us is its limitations. Nothing can be clearer than this, that human personality develops. Personality is not given to us ready-made and complete. *It slowly develops within.*

The metaphorical language both of

¹ Fraser, 'Philosophy of Theism,' i. 46.

Scripture and common life may be brought to illustrate this imperfect condition of personality. We say of a man, He is not himself to-day. If you analyse that phrase in a prosaic and literal way, it is simple nonsense to say he is not himself. And yet it is the expression of a spiritual fact professedly real. So the Bible says, 'when he came to himself.'¹ Taken literally the language is absurd. Taken spiritually it is most profound. It is the attempt to explain the emergence of the person out of a less complete into a more complete condition, into something more approximate to self-possession.

Some time ago a number of letters in *The Spectator* recounted individual experience as to the way in which they came to know themselves as separate persons. One says that he remembers distinctly how, far back in childhood, it suddenly flashed upon him that he belonged to himself. Until then he had regarded himself as the property of others. Now the con-

¹ S. Luke xv. 17.

sciousness came of his separate personality. And the discovery filled him with delight; for it brought an exhilarating sense of independence. Another says that he passed through a similar experience, only that it produced the opposite effect. Instead of delighting it made him afraid; for it produced a sense of loneliness hitherto unexperienced, and he took refuge from himself in the society of other people. Others say that they cannot recall any precise moment when the fact of personality dawned upon them as a conscious possession. All they can tell is that once they knew not what now they know. Their consciousness of personality has been gradual. And this is the important point. Personality, like everything we possess develops by degrees. This is obvious in a moment when we remember that the principal components of personality are three: power to think, power to will, power to love.¹ And all these grow with our growth. Accordingly

¹ Moberly, 'Atonement and Personality.'

it is clear that we possess personality rather in the germ than in completion. It is rather the goal of our development than our present possession.

Recent psychological investigation has greatly emphasised this growth of personality. The capacity of the mind to continue working while its possessor is not aware until some conclusion is suddenly flashed upon him has often arrested our attention. It was formerly described as unconscious cerebration. We are now told by psychologists that our personality extends into regions beyond those of which we have any conscious recognition; that 'no Self of which we can have cognisance is in reality more than a fragment of a larger Self';¹ that portions of our personality are, so to say, submerged; they lie below the levels of clear self-consciousness; that they may in time emerge into permanent elevation and become our realised possession. This submerged element has been termed

¹ Meyer, 'Personality,' i. 14.

the subliminal consciousness. Such is the latest theory in psychological research. It is mentioned here merely to confirm the fact that human personality is progressive. We slowly advance in the art of self-possession. That is to say, we become more truly personal as we go on.

3. Personality slowly develops. That is one limitation. A second is that it *needs association with others*. It is nowhere sufficient for itself. One of the strangest facts in personality is its loneliness. We are the solitary occupants of an impenetrable fortress. 'No man can scale the barriers into the personality of another,'¹ to think for him, to feel instead of him, to participate in his self-consciousness. The lonely Self within these barriers can admit none, on any pretext whatever, into partnership there. There are indeed certain morbid instances which look like a temporary abdication or dethronement of personality, a substitution of dominion from without, over a paralysed

¹ Harris, 'Philosophic Basis of Theism,' p. 414.

and captivated self—but these appalling anomalies only emphasise more completely the right of personality to uninvaded self-possession. As Matthew Arnold wrote :

Yes : in the sea of life enisled,
With echoing straits between us thrown,
Dotting the shoreless watery wild.
We mortal millions live alone.

But the point before us is that human personality feels profoundly that this solitude is not its perfection but its incompleteness. For personal existence, as we know it, to become complete, it is compelled to seek in other persons what it cannot possess in itself. Social life is a necessity for the person, not only for the good it brings to others, but for the good it brings to self. A created person must go forth from the solitude of his own precincts into social communion with other minds. And only by doing that can he become complete. The lonely person is essentially incomplete. 'As iron sharpeneth iron, so doth a man the countenance of his friend.' Of course

it may be true to say never less alone than when alone. But that is only really true when the person so alone is alone with God. But the real unit in human life is not the individual, it is the family. For human personality, taken alone, is essentially incomplete. To begin with, if left to himself he would not survive, or if he did it could only be as a dwarfed and shrivelled bundle of unexercised capabilities. Not only is he dependent, right and left, continually, for service on the personality of others, but he cannot develop or exercise his noblest faculties for self-sacrifice, devotion, sympathy, generosity, love, except in relation to other personalities than his own. Indeed it has been said that we have here the essential fact in personality, that it is the capacity for fellowship and communion with others. A man is only truly personal as he becomes conscious of relationship to persons other than himself.¹ The individual person is but a fragmentary unit in the collective

¹ Richmond, 'Essay on Personality,' p. 21.

life.¹ The very language which he speaks is not his own so much as it is the creation of the collective intelligence from which he receives it. Language is the common storehouse of ideas, the record of collective experiences,² and the individual person is the recipient of these signs and symbols, each bearing the impress of age-long usage upon them. Thus personality in man seems essentially relative to that of others. It only realises itself in the collective life. Here we have that most wonderful social aspect of personality.

II.

From these thoughts on human personality let us advance to consider personality in God.

Now here various departments of modern thought demur to the procedure. You speak, it will be said, of advancing from personality in man to that in God. But this is

¹ Richmond, 'Essay on Personality,' p. 22.

² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

precisely the difficulty. Can you do it? Is this advance from human personality to divine anything more than setting up, as God, a magnified man? While you would refuse to say that God resembles man in bodily form, do you not, after all, describe Him as a glorified human spirit?

Such misgivings as these are widely prevalent, and they suggest to us a most important caution. All human reflection on the nature of God should be controlled by the remembrance that man is finite and God is uncreated. To comprehend God is impossible except for God Himself. None but God's equal can do it. And we do wisely to listen to questions such as this:—What relation can exist between God, as He is in Himself, and those manifestations of Him which can penetrate the narrow windows of a created mind? It is certain that our noblest thoughts of Him must fall immeasurably beneath what God really is. For we can only understand God's personality through the medium of our own. And

the consciousness that even our knowledge of that is altogether incomplete should be an additional reminder of our ignorance about God. And even if we possessed a perfect knowledge of self there would still remain between us and God the fact that He is eternal and we of yesterday. What can we take in? What can we know? What can we hope to understand? These reflections must do us good. They sober and restrain. They should prevent self-confidence in a realm where above all things a confession of our ignorance becomes us best.

All religious minds have felt this, and felt it proportionately to their spirituality and depth. The greatest masters of religious thought are never weary of impressing upon us the narrowness of our appreciation of God :

‘Canst thou by searching find out
God ?

Canst thou find out the Almighty unto
perfection ?

It is as high as heaven ; what canst thou do ?

Deeper than hell ; what canst thou know ? ¹

Yet while we all confess that no human conception of God can be adequate, nevertheless it may be true as far as it goes. The personality of God must surpass that of man to an extent to us unimaginable. That we can well believe. Yet it must be also true that what God really is can be, to a considerable extent, revealed to us and that we on our side can take it in. God is what He tells us He is, although of course immeasurably more wonderful than what we understand. Thus, when we say that God is personal we are admittedly advancing from something incomplete to something perfect. But while we acknowledge that the dissimilarity is immense we are equally persuaded that the resemblance between them is real.

And here let us remember that a personal

¹ Job xi. 7, 8.

God is a necessity for religion. There can be no relationship of love except between persons. A personal creature must have a personal God. You cannot put your trust in a thing. You cannot, being personal, lavish your highest, find scope for your noblest, except in personal relationship. No impersonalities, nor infinities, nor immensities, nor distractions, however etherealised, can be substitutes in religion for a personal God. On that point Jew, Moham-
medan, and Christian are at one.

But let it be also remembered that the personality of God is not the simplest of all truths. If a man attempt to realise what it means it is far away *the most difficult dogma* ever suggested to human apprehension.

To assent to the personality of the Infinite is to assent to a dogma before which all other doctrines sink into relative insignificance.¹ This needs to be restated; for men sometimes speak as if it was quite easy to believe that God is personal and

¹ Wace, 'Bampton Lectures,' p. 15.

only difficult to believe that God's personality is threefold. And yet the deeper human thought goes down the more tremendous becomes the affirmation of a personal yet uncreated eternal One. The truth is that the modern reason by no means finds it easy to believe in God's personality at all.¹

So the authoress of 'Robert Elsmere' makes her hero say :

' I often lie here . . . wondering at the way in which men become the slaves of some metaphysical word—*personality*, or *intelligence*, or what not ! What meaning can they have ? Herbert Spencer is quite right. We no sooner attempt to define what we mean by a personal God than we lose ourselves in labyrinths of language and logic. But why attempt it at all ? '

Only because it is a religious necessity. Only because it is impossible to do without the attempt. I am compelled to ask what I mean by a personal God. Unless He is personal and I myself am personal, unless

¹ Cf. 'Robert Elsmere.'

² *Ibid.*, ch. 51, p. 603.

He is capable of thought, will, love ; unless righteousness, goodness, justice are among His attributes, He cannot be the object of devotion and love for personal beings. And to say that His personality is hard to define is only to say what is true of personality in ourselves. Yet a clear conception of human personality is obviously a most important possession. We do not surrender the attempt to understand human nature merely because an exact definition of its personality lies beyond our power. There is no fundamental theme of human thought in which we may not lose ourselves in labyrinths of language and logic. But certainly that does not prevent an age which investigates everything from endeavouring to understand. In any case, define it or not, we know what a person means. It will make all the difference in the world to the lover whether the object of his affections is a living person or only a corpse. If, confronted with the latter, he exclaims, She is not here ; the person is gone : it

will be small help to tell him not to become the slave of a metaphysical word which he cannot define. The intellect may be incompetent to avoid the labyrinth of language and logic into which that term 'person' may lead us, but the heart understands. And in Religion it is just the same. We know well enough the difference between the unconscious corpse of deity and what we mean by a personal God, and no reminder of our incompetence to define can obscure the vital distinction.

But the important fact to remember is that, after all, the most stupendous dogma is not that God's personality is threefold, it is that God is personal. The peculiar form of that personality is subordinate to the fact that He is personal. And, as I hope we shall come to see, the triple form of the personality, so far from increasing the difficulty does really greatly decrease it, for it makes intelligible much that cannot otherwise be so.

With these reflections let us proceed to think of God's personality.

When human and divine personality are compared we shall expect to find two things: the one similarity, the other difference.

1. There must be *similarity*.

This is taught by reason. If there were no similarity between God and ourselves religion would be impossible.

It is taught by the fact that man was created in the Image of God. The Image of God means personality.

And all Revelation is based on the assumption that profound similarity exists between personality in God and in man.

But the most conclusive proof of the similarity is given in the doctrine of the Incarnation. For according to this doctrine the similarity is so great that in the case of Jesus Christ a divine Person could take the place ordinarily occupied in human nature by a created person.

2. But if between God and man there must be similarity, so also there must be *difference*. And that difference must be

exceeding great. Everything in God must immeasurably surpass and excel everything in man. Man is no doubt a very real resemblance to God, but it is a distant resemblance after all, a created resemblance. It is such resemblance as a mere creature can possess of the Uncreated. But the more we dwell on man's nothing perfect and God's all complete, the more alive we must become to the measureless abyss between personality in God and that in man. Personality in man is, as we have seen, conspicuous for its limitations. It is a hint and a suggestion of possibilities inconceivably glorious. But it is little more. It is essentially incomplete. It painfully develops in slow progression. It can only achieve maturity in relation with other persons. 'In point of fact,' says Lotze,¹ 'we have little ground for speaking of the personality of finite beings; it is an ideal which, like all that is ideal, belongs unconditionally only to the Infinite, but, like all

¹ 'Microcosmus,' ii. 687.

that is good, appertains to us only conditionally and hence imperfectly.' 'Perfect personality is in God only, to all finite minds there is allotted but a pale copy thereof.'¹ Hence it is manifest that personality in God must rise superior to all the limitations and incompleteness inseparable from our own. We must not think of human personality as if it were perfect, and then infer the existence of precisely similar conditions in the personality of God. The fact that personality in my own case is onefold does not justify me in assuming that the same must be true of God. Manifestly the personality of God must be infinitely richer than that of man. It must contain within itself all that created persons can only acquire by becoming associated with other created persons.

3. Now according to the *Christian doctrine* God is personal; there is the likeness to men; but, unlike man, God's personality is threefold. This threefoldness

¹ Lotze, 'Microcosmus,' p. 688.

is its distinctive feature. There is the dissimilarity : God is personal, but He is not *a* Person. His unity is a unity of Persons. The highest form of personality, according to Christianity, is a fellowship of Persons, a communion, a social life of perfect unity in which each Person is capable of complete communion with the others in the most perfect conceivable way.¹

¹ Cf. Richmond, 'Essay on Personality,' p. 17.

IV

THE VALUE OF THE TRINITARIAN CONCEPTION TO MODERN THOUGHT.

IV.

THE VALUE OF THE TRINITARIAN CONCEPTION TO MODERN THOUGHT.

THE Christian doctrine of God is essentially Trinitarian. It affirms the co-existence within the divine Unity of a triple personality. The question before us is, what is the practical value of this Christian doctrine of divine personality? Englishmen, as an eminently practical race, constantly exhibit a philistine impatience towards speculative thought; and a lurking suspicion may often exist that, after all, for practical purposes, the difference would not be great between a Trinitarian and a Unitarian conception of God.

I.

First, then, let us try to see what is *the value to the intellect* of the Trinitarian doctrine.

Men sometimes tell us that the conception of God as one single person is easier to understand than the intricate doctrine of personality as threefold. But if this assertion be correct on a superficial view, it is certainly false on deeper reflection. The conception of God as one solitary person presents the greatest difficulties to modern thought.

1. A single eternal person, an undifferentiated unit, a being admitting no inner distinctions, seems provided with no object other than self, is confronted by nothing, and tends to fade away from human thought into vagueness and nothingness.

The difficulty to thought may be illustrated in the following way. The Deism of the eighteenth century separated as sharply as possible between God and the created world. God, they taught, found scope for His personality in the act of creation. But that initial action once completed, He took His departure from a world which He had never visited since.¹ But this far distant

¹ Cf. Martineau, 'Study of Religion,' ii. p. 180.

divinity, somewhere on the remotest borderline beyond the universe, ceased for all practical purposes any longer to possess the characteristics of personal existence. No doubt He exerted the attributes of personality once, ages ago, but what sign of His existence has been manifested since? Was there any intellectual necessity for so vast a postulate? A world relegated to the control of immutable law and pure mechanism no longer seemed to need a personal divinity. God became little more than a remote first cause; and the tendency was to lose belief in an absentee divinity whose permanent necessity had already disappeared.¹

Now in reaction from this Deistic severance between God and the world, with its evaporation of God's personality into something indistinguishable from impersonal power, men went over to the opposite extreme. God was regarded now as completely identified with the world—God was present in everything, or rather everything

¹ Cf. Martineau, 'Study of Religion,' ii. p. 137.

existed in God. The divine presence was no longer viewed as coming in occasional visits to the world, but as resting in it for ever.¹ But then again the same disastrous tendency reappeared to ruin belief in the personality of God. For God, thus identified with the world, seemed to lose His personality just as badly as before. Consequently once more the effort must be made to state the relation between God and the world in such a way that both the sides of truth can be preserved. Hence, then, the true relation is that while God is universal in the world, He nevertheless surpasses or transcends the world.

‘But how,’ asks an eminent Unitarian writer, ‘can we pass from the idea of God to the idea of creation?’ God he describes as ‘an infinite lonely Mind.’² ‘By what possibility can the absolutely One cease to be one and pass into a duality?’ There is in eternity nothing but Himself. In that

¹ Martineau, ‘Study of Religion,’ ii. p. 183.

² *Ibid.*, p. 137.

passionless, uninvaded, imperturbable existence, what is there to account for the possibility of change? 'Why and when did He begin to create? Was there a defect in His being without a universe? If so, how did He spend an eternity without it?' Martineau proposes as a solution the idea of perpetual creation. We begin to think that what once He did He always does, and has for ever done.

You see what leads this eminent writer to the idea of perpetual creation. It provides an object for the infinite lonely Mind. It gives scope for His activities, something other than self upon which He is able to rest. So difficult it is for man to realise a self-contained eternal person—all alone. But if this thought of perpetual creation relieves the difficulty of God's loneliness, it introduces others of a very serious kind. For it seems to make the world eternal as well as God. But this would be destructive of all true deity. Martineau seems to feel it, for he throws another suggestion out

which, if pursued, would lead him far from the doctrine of an 'infinite lonely Mind.' 'Is it that Mind,' he asks, 'is in itself a dual existence, inasmuch as it involves at once a thinking subject and an object thought?' His answer is, 'Yes: but in the primal absence of all save God, both of these are within Himself.'¹ There is nothing external to God. There is nothing but His own self-consciousness, nothing upon which to direct it except Himself. It would be hard to formulate more incisively the intellectual difficulties incurred by belief in a unipersonal God. Now it is just here that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity would have given precisely what the thinker needs. For the doctrine of the Trinity affirms the co-existence in God of thinking subject and object thought, in what is manifestly a form of absolute perfection. The infinite Mind is with difficulty rendered intelligible so long as no inner diversity is recognised within the Unity. But when once such diversities

¹ Martineau, 'Study of Religion,' ii. p. 137.

are acknowledged to exist in God, and to exist in the highest, that is a personal, form, this difficulty to the intellect disappears. And this is precisely what the Christian doctrine does. It supplies what the deepest thought on the subject requires—personal distinctions within the Unity.

2. A second intellectual difficulty in the Unitarian view is that it is unable to find room, in the noblest sense, for *the Fatherhood of God*. The peculiarity of the Unitarian doctrine of God, according to its ablest modern English exponent, consists in restricting our thoughts to God *as recorded in history*, and in deliberately refusing to discuss the question, what God is in Himself. They think of God, we are told, as the Author of the creation. ‘With what He is in Himself, irrespective of His works—with all He was in any lone eternity prior to the life-giving fiat of His will, they do not concern themselves :¹ they begin with the creation, in whose laws they see the impress of His

¹ Martineau, ‘Essays,’ ii. 527.

wisdom and the scope of His omnipotence.' ¹
 'He is co-extensive with the organism of nature, beyond which their contemplation is not accustomed to pass.' 'Their religion is *since* nature and history, and *within* nature and history. *Here* they think God's work is determinate and known; and the outlying region of mystery is to them as though it were not.' ²

Thus the titles which the Unitarian bestows upon God are such as the following: He is 'the Author of the Universe,' He is 'the Father of Spirits,' He is 'their moral Governor,' He is 'the Providence of History.'

Now it is equally characteristic of the Trinitarian doctrine that it refuses to limit its thoughts to God's historic manifestations. It does urgently concern itself with God in the lone eternity prior to the life-giving fiat of His will. Its contemplation is accustomed to pass beyond the organism of nature, beyond the whole created universe, and to

¹ Martineau, 'Essays,' p. 528.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 528, 529.

fix itself upon *God as He is in Himself*—God in His own eternal nature ‘or ever the earth and the world were made.’ This is the peculiarly Christian procedure. Undoubtedly the Scripture is largely concerned with the historic entrance of God into the life of humanity, but it is also for that very reason concerned with God antecedent to, independent of, any such crisis in human development. It goes behind creation to describe the essential life of Deity. ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.’ This first: apart from all temporal manifestations, whether in nature or in history.

Thus the distinctive genius of the two religions is exactly opposed. The one deliberately confines itself within the bounds of the creation; the other as deliberately goes beyond them.

Now let us see the effect of this on one of the greatest of religious doctrines—that of the Fatherhood of God.

The term 'Fatherhood' can be employed in three distinct senses. First, as a purely human relationship. Employed in that sense it denotes origination and identity of nature between father and son. This is the least it can mean. And, to become ideal, it must mature into moral and intellectual unity; a harmony of will and purpose, of mutual sympathy and understanding. That first, as a relation between man and man.

Secondly, Fatherhood may denote a relationship between God and mankind. Here origination is of another order altogether. Fatherhood here does not denote production from Himself. There is no identity of nature in this case between Father and son. It denotes indeed creation, preservation, adoption, benevolence. It involves a capacity for moral and intellectual unity so far as the creator can identify himself with the uncreated. But there is, and always must remain, an infinite distinction between this Fatherhood and the class of beings who

are by the most ineffable condescension elevated into a dignity of sonship which is not theirs by nature or by right.

Now it may be open to question which of these two is the truer Fatherhood after all. Is Fatherhood in the strictest sense a purely human relationship transferred metaphorically to a relationship between God and man? Is the real Fatherhood that which exists on earth, and the Fatherhood of God something of a secondary kind? Can that be the truest Fatherhood where no identity of nature exists? Does not Fatherhood, whatever else it may include, involve as its basis identity of nature? Is it not correct that to the ordinary mass of men the Fatherhood of man seems much more real than the Fatherhood of God? Whatever answer may be given to these inquiries, what is certain is that Christianity gives a third sense to this great expression.

The Christian conception is that Fatherhood is an essential and eternal attribute of

God ; that there is in God *the* Father and *the* Son ; that Fatherhood is not a relationship of production and identity of nature strictly true only on earth, and applied as a metaphor to the relation between God and the human race ; that on the contrary the ideal of all Fatherhood exists in God Himself. According to the Christian conception all other Fatherhood is but an imperfect shadow and distant copy of this essential Fatherhood of God. There is a Sonship whose characteristics are eternal origination, identity of nature, identity in thought and affection and will. There is a Fatherhood and a Sonship both alike eternal, whose distinction is for sublimity and wonder surpassed by nothing except their unity.

Compared with this, even the Fatherhood of God towards His creatures sinks into comparative subordination. It is not, it cannot be considered, half so real.

And yet a Jewish writer in a recent

number of *The Hibbert Journal*¹ says ironically that 'the Jew has called God "our Father" as long as the Christian'; on this point he feels quite 'convinced that he has nothing to learn.'¹ Now the use of an expression is one thing, but everything depends upon the depth of meaning introduced into that expression by its respective utterers. A devout Jew would probably admit that the application of the term "Our Father" to God by the ancient heathen world was by no means equivalent in depth and fullness to the use of the same term among the chosen people. And manifestly, although the term may be identical, yet the significance is vastly different according as the divine Fatherhood means a certain relationship to His creatures, or an eternal distinction in the nature of God Himself. And no identity of expression ought to conceal from us the immensity of the difference which severs the two conceptions.

Now of Fatherhood in this unique and

¹ July, 1905, p. 654.

loftiest sense Unitarianism knows nothing. The Fatherhood of God in a religion which 'does not concern itself' with God 'irrespective of His works' is an attribute which became appropriate to God subsequently to the creation of the human race. But in the lone eternity behind creation God was not, to this religion, a Father at all. It is, then, impossible for the Unitarian conception of the Fatherhood of God to possess the fullness and depth inherent in the Christian conception of the same. To the one the name denotes a temporal relationship, to the other an essential condition. This is admirably expressed by one who made the transition from the former to the latter faith :¹

'I was bred a Unitarian. To realise the meaning of the name of Father, the meaning of the Unity of God, is my calling and duty. I believe there cannot be a Father without an only begotten Son of the same substance with Himself; that

¹ 'Life of F. D. Maurice,' ii. 515.

there cannot be any Unity but the Unity of the eternal Father with the eternal Son in the eternal Spirit.'

3. The difficulties encountered by the mind in attempting to regard God as a solitary person are still more impressive in a third direction, namely, in reference to the doctrine that God is Love. Here is, beyond question, the most glorious of all God's attributes. Here we reach the very heart of the Christian revelation. And the religious mind yields to this doctrine its most joyful assent. But the question is—What is meant by the assertion that God is Love? Who is it that God loves? The answer immediately given will generally be—ourselves. Yes; but before we existed, whom did God love then? Our forefathers. Yes; but again, there was a time when they also did not exist. Whom did God love before the human race was created? Do you say, the angels? Very well. But remember that the whole intelligent creation collectively could not possibly supply an

adequate object for the love which is uncreated. Before, then, the angels or the human race were made—whom did God love? In the lone eternity, when there was none but God Himself, had He no object upon whom His love could rest? Did He, then, love Himself? But it is the essence of real love that it should be directed upon other than self. Love demands an object. And that object must be personal. And that person, if he is to be an adequate object for an infinite love, must be as perfect as He is who bestows the love. In other words, the only adequate object of divine love must be a person Himself divine. If God were one lonely Person, then love in Him would seem to mean an unexercised capacity, a capacity only partially called forth since creation, and wholly unexerted in eternity for lack of an adequate object upon whom it could be bestowed.

Now it is just this difficulty which Christianity meets and answers. It tells us

that God has never been alone. It tells us that there co-exists within one divine being a Trinity of Persons. It declares that God is Love. It reveals love as actually bestowed and actually responded to within the divine life itself. It seems also to suggest even the triple nature of love : Love bestowed, love returned ; and the mutual love of Both outpoured upon a Third, who is the bond of union between Them ; such as, to borrow an earthly and imperfect illustration, is shadowed in the human home. And significantly confirming this, it should be remembered that the *doctrine* that God is Love was, as a *fact of history*, declared to the world *simultaneously* with the doctrine that in God personality is threefold. And this is natural. You do not find in the Old Testament a full and explicit declaration that love is the basis of deity. You find, as you might expect—God is power, God is wisdom, God is eternal, God is self-existent. But you have to wait for New Testament times

to read the full revelation of that most glorious of Almighty God's attributes. It is not Isaiah, nor Elijah, it is S. John who declares that God is Love.

It amounts then, to this, that the Trinitarian doctrine of divine personality is of the highest intellectual worth, because it gives a conception of perfect personality as no other doctrine does. 'The doctrine of the Trinity, so dogmatically elaborated, is, in fact, the most philosophical attempt to conceive of God as personal.'¹ Aubrey Moore, in '*Lux Mundi*,' says that 'For the modern world the Christian doctrine of God remains as the only safeguard in reason for a permanent theistic belief.' As for the Unitarian theory, Illingworth says, 'The Unitarian imagines his conception of God as an undifferentiated Unity to be simpler than the Christian. But it cannot really be translated into thought. It cannot be thought out.'² And Aubrey Moore says,

¹ Illingworth, '*Personality Human and Divine*,' pp. 38-9.

² *Ibid.*, p. 41.

‘If God is to be personal, as religion requires, metaphysics demands still a distinction in the Unity which Unitarianism is compelled to deny.’¹

Viewed intellectually, then, the Trinitarian doctrine has the highest value, because it gives the most profound and self-consistent doctrine of God. If belief in the personality of God is to remain stable and permanent in modern thought, it must advance to the full Trinitarian creed.

The more the mind attempts to dwell on the thought of one lonely infinite personality, with no inner distinctions whatever, the more difficult it becomes to retain belief in such a personality. It becomes merged into the universe. It becomes the impersonal background out of which all phenomena spring. Or else it moves onward into the Trinitarian faith.²

¹ ‘Lux Mundi,’ ‘The Christian Doctrine of God.’

² Cf. Fisher, ‘History of Christian Doctrine,’ p. 440.

II.

So far, then, for the value of the Trinitarian doctrine to the intellect. Next let us realise its value to *religion*. Let us see how it affects our personal religion.

‘I am constrained to say,’ writes Martineau, ‘that neither my intellectual preference nor my moral admiration goes heartily with the Unitarian heroes, sects, or productions of any age. Arians, Socinians, all seem to me to contrast unfavourably with their opponents, and to exhibit a type of thought and character far less worthy, on the whole, of the true genius of Christianity. I am conscious that my deepest obligations as a learner from others are in almost every department to writers not of my own creed. . . . In devotional literature and religious thought I find nothing of ours that does not pale before Augustine, Tauler, and Pascal. And in the poetry of the Church, it is the Latin or the German hymns or the lines of

Charles Wesley or of Keble that fasten on my memory and heart, and make all else seem poor and cold. I cannot help this. I can only say I am sure it is no perversity ; and I believe the preference is founded in reason and nature, and is already widely spread amongst us.'¹

There is something extremely touching in this acknowledgment of the spiritual value of the productions of another creed—this sight of a gifted intellect kindling itself into warmth at the fire of another shrine. But whether it is a reasonable procedure is another matter.

It is strange that an intellect so acute failed to ask whether this vast diversity of devotional result did not spring from diversity of principle. Martineau acknowledges, with a frankness which reveals the goodness of his heart, that there is nothing in Unitarian devotional literature which does not pale before Augustine, and that its hymns, compared with those of Wesley

¹ Martineau, 'Essays,' ii. 375.

and Keble, seem poor and cold. He acknowledges the fact, but he makes no attempt to ascertain its meaning. He only tells us, what we firmly believe, that he cannot help it and that it is due to no perversity. But we must deliberately face the inquiry why it is that the poetry of the Church burns with a fire not found elsewhere. We may be sure that a universal phenomenon is the outcome of a definite cause. There must lie in the dogmatic convictions of the Church's devotional writers principles which explain, create, and justify their unwonted fervour, their peculiar fire.

Let us take, as an instance, the well-known words of Faber :

There is no place where earth's sorrows
Are more felt than up in heaven,
There is no place where earth's failings
Have such kindly judgment given ;
For the love of God is broader
Than the measures of man's mind,
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.

So Faber wrote. But whence was this

glowing thought and fervid expression derived? What gave his mind this insight into the love of God, his heart such fire? The answer is impossible to doubt. He learnt it from the Incarnation. It is prompted by his belief in the literal divinity of Jesus Christ. It is perfectly natural to one who has acknowledged in Jesus Christ the personal investiture of deity in flesh, working out through His human mind the redemption of the world. It is the constraining power of an appeal which says, to borrow Browning's words :

Love I gave thee with Myself to love,
And thou must love Me who have died for thee.

No wonder if the rapturous expressions of adoring love and gratitude sprang from an awakened mind and kindled heart, as it heard and realised an appeal like this. But what if you cancel all that dogmatic faith? What if you deny the Incarnation, and replace its glowing conceptions of mutual love and sacrifice in heaven with the chilly solitude of the unipersonal

God—would it be equally natural still, under convictions entirely changed, for the devotional writer to express his soul in the same fervent, exalted phrases as before? Would it be even possible? The devotion of a Wesley or a Keble toward God is devotion awakened by belief in Incarnation, in divine self-sacrifice, in personal eternal love in heaven. But can the devotion reasonably exist if the doctrines are destroyed? Could Wesley or Keble still have written as they did if their God were an undifferentiated unit incapable by constitution of those very deeds for which they loved Him? Is it not self-evident that the mainspring of their devotion would be broken if the doctrines were removed; that their utterances must bear proportion to the conceptions by which they were evoked; that other and alien conceptions must necessarily prove incapable of awakening an equal love or kindling an equal fire?

For the fact is that if we enumerate the

most sublime and gracious, the most appealing and persuasive portions of the Christian faith, we shall see that every one of them ultimately rests on the Trinitarian conception of God.

1. The first and most distinctive feature of the Christian religion is its declaration that the life of God is a life of essential Fatherhood and mutual love.

2. The second is that the Uncreated God possesses a capacity for sacrifice, a power to yield what is to Him most precious.

3. The third is that the sin of the world affected the innermost life and being of God.

4. The fourth is that there has actually taken place a personal entrance of God into human nature, and a self-identity of God with the needs of humanity and with the permitted anguish of the world.

Such are among the basal principles of the Christian religion. But let it be remembered that every one of them depends, for its validity, upon personal distinctions in the being of God ; in other words, on the

doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Without that there is neither essential Fatherhood nor mutual love in heaven, nor capacity for sacrifice, nor the possibility of moral evil affecting the inner life of God, nor self-identity of God with mankind, nor personal entrance into the permitted experiences of the world.

All those appeals to human emotion and affection suggested by the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, all those amazing glimpses into heights and depths of God's anger and pity which belong distinctively and exclusively to the Christian religion, are founded on the fact of the threefold personality in God.

Martineau's keen insight detected the difference in kind between the forms of devotion which the two religions create, and his spiritual yearnings drew him towards that religion of divine love from which his antecedents and philosophic theories kept him back. So he borrowed their language of devotion while unable to accept their

thought. He committed an inconsistency of the intellect in the endeavour to satisfy a spiritual need. And he has paid a very remarkable tribute to the elevating power of the Christian faith. But that elevating power which he acknowledges is the product of doctrines which he rejects. Now if it were as he supposed, we should be landed in the piteous and singular result that the sublimest devotion is the product of a delusion, that falsehood has effected what truth has not.

And let us remember that in the nature of things the Unitarian doctrine cannot be expected to produce, nay, it ought not to produce, that response of human adoration and love which the Christian faith has constantly elicited. Why not? Simply because the Unitarian God has not done for humanity what the Trinitarian God has done. If He does not win the same response it is because He has not made the same appeal. And in the nature of the case He cannot make it. Whatever

the Unitarian conception represents God as doing for mankind, the Trinitarian conception represents the same. And, in addition, it represents precisely what the other excludes, and precisely what above all appeals to the human conscience and heart.

III.

But not only does the doctrine of the Trinity profoundly affect our personal religion, it also affects our view of *social life*.

For it is plain that if God is a lonely Person all His eternal attributes must be self-regarding. The self-forgetting side of goodness can find no place in absolute isolation. The social qualities in God could have no exercise until after the creation.

And therefore the worshipper can only ascribe social attributes to God so long as he connects Him with created persons. But if his thoughts attempt to venture back into the eternity behind creation, if he dares to reflect on the infinite lonely Mind,

he can find no social characteristics there. Hence the God of the Unitarian is a God in whom the self-regarding attributes of wisdom and power precede by eternity the self-forgetting attributes of benevolence and compassion.

Now assuredly this must unconsciously colour a man's whole view of social life. A very able writer, who himself knew this by experience, assures us that it is so :

‘I can answer for myself that the Unitarian conviction that God is—*as* God and in His eternal essence—a single solitary personality, influenced my imagination and the whole colour of my faith most profoundly. Such a conviction thoroughly realised renders it impossible to identify any of the social attributes with His real *essence*.’¹ . . .

‘Unitarians eagerly deny—once eagerly denied—that God is to them a solitary omnipotence.’² Nor is He. But I am sure that the conception of a single eternal

¹ Hutton, ‘Theological Essays,’ p. 257.

² *Ibid.*, p. 258.

personality as originating and infinitely antecedent to all acts of love or spiritual communion with any other, affects vitally the temper of their faith. The throne of heaven is to them a lonely one. The solitude of the eternities weighs upon their imaginations. Social are necessarily postponed to individual attributes ; for they date from a later origin—from creation—while power and thought are eternal.' . . . 'I am sure that this notion of God as the Absolute Cause does tincture deeply even the highest form of Unitarian faith, and I cannot see how it could be otherwise. If our prayers are addressed to One whose eternity we habitually image as unshared, we necessarily for the time merge the Father in the omniscient and omnipotent genius of the universe. If, on the other hand, we pray to One who has revealed His own eternity through the Eternal Son ; if—in the spirit of the liturgies—we alternate our prayers to the eternal originating love and to that filial love in which it has been

eternally mirrored, turning from the Father of heaven to the Son, Redeemer of the world, and back again to Him in whom that Son for ever rests—then we keep a God essentially social before our hearts and minds, and fill our imagination with no solitary grandeur.’¹

It is the doctrine of the Trinity which assures us that the highest existence is a social unity of life and love; that social perfection exists in God; that the social and individual aspects of existence are there combined in absolute unity.

The application of this principle to human social life would undoubtedly revolutionise much of it if only it came to be understood.

We have attempted to realise the value of the doctrine of the Trinity for modern thought. But let us remember that its reasonableness is not the ground on which it was first accepted, nor is it the principal part of its authority. We accept the

¹ Hutton, ‘Theological Essays,’ p. 259.

doctrine *as a revelation* through Christ, telling us what God is. A revelation from God cannot be irrational, yet, of course, it may surpass the limits of reason to comprehend. The early ages accepted the doctrine as a truth revealed, and bowed themselves before its character in a way that, whether rightly or wrongly, the modern mind is reluctant to do. We may well believe that Christian reflection in the course of many generations may come to see more reason in the revelation than was granted to men at the first.

But, when everything is said, this basal doctrine of Christianity must remain profoundly unfathomable. Still, the old saying continues true: 'I am speaking of God. You do not comprehend. If you did comprehend it would not be God of whom I should be speaking.'

